



Genre, Gender and Nation: Ideological and Intertextual Representation in Contemporary Arthurian Fiction for Children

Adele Cook

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**Genre, Gender and Nation: Ideological and
Intertextual Representations in Contemporary
Arthurian Fiction for Children**

A. M. COOK

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GENRE, GENDER AND NATION: IDEOLOGICAL AND
INTERTEXTUAL REPRESENTATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY
ARTHURIAN FICTION FOR CHILDREN

by

Adèle Cook

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Abstract

Within late twentieth and early twenty-first century children's literature there is a significant interest amongst authors and readers for material which recreates the Arthurian myth. Many of these draw on medieval texts, and the canonical texts of the English tradition have been particularly influential. Yet within this intertextual discourse the influence of the Victorian works is noticeable. This thesis explores the relationship between contemporary children's Arthuriana and the gendered and national ideologies of these earlier works. Using feminist critical discourse analysis, it discusses the evolution of Arthuriana for the child reader, with a particular focus on four contemporary texts: Michael Morpurgo's (1994) *Arthur, High King of Britain*, Mary Hoffman's (2000) *Women of Camelot: Queens and Enchantresses at the Court of King Arthur*, Diana Wynne Jones' (1993) *Hexwood* and the BBC series *Merlin* (2008-2012). Exploring the historicist and fantasy genres opens up a discourse surrounding the psychology of myth which within the context of Arthurian literature creates a sense of a universal 'truth'.

This work reveals that authorial intent, in both historicist and fantasy narratives, is often undercut by implicit ideologies which reveal unconscious cultural assumptions. The cultural context at the time of textual production and consumption affects the representations of both the ideologies of gender and nation and yet the authority of myth and history combine to create a regressive depiction more in keeping with literature from the Victorian and post-World War II eras. This is explored through a review of the literature for children available since the Age of Reason, and the didactic model which has been prevalent throughout the Arthurian genre. This thesis explores why a regressive representation is appealing within a twenty-first century discourse through an engagement with theories

of feminism(s) and postfeminism. This thesis ascertains why the psychology of myth affects the reimagining of Arthuriana, and explores the retrospective nature of intertextuality in order to reflect on the trend for regressive representations in children's Arthurian literature.

I would like to dedicate this work to Terry Cook and Alison Commander for their unwavering support, and to Dr Clare Walsh and Dr Nicola Darwood for their invaluable advice.

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1. Introduction: Theoretical Approaches

The aim of this thesis is to examine ideology within Arthurian literature, and to explore whether ideologies of gender and nation have become associated with a medievalism which conforms to a dominant historical metanarrative which is culturally desirable within a twenty-first century discourse. Late twentieth and twenty-first century texts appear to embrace a faux-medievalism which embraces the Victorian model of national and gender representations. This thesis will examine the ideological and intertextual use of the English canon within children's literature, drawing on the theories of Kristeva and Bakhtin, which suggest that the medieval and Victorian texts have the potential to reveal retro-sexist ideologies in contemporary culture. It will examine the extent to which contemporary fictions for children are directly indebted to Malorian influences as many authors claim, and to what extent the ideology of these texts is mediated by Victorian Arthuriana. This is of significant interest if scholars are to understand possible future directions in Arthurian literature and the potential wider implications such representations have for the development of cultures and ideologies which fall outside of the dominant paradigm.

Much like Wood's (2008: 4-5) work, which focuses on the motif of the Holy Grail, this exploration of children's Arthuriana is 'concerned with how a tale, which developed in the feudal world of Western Europe, has been transformed into a myth of global proportions'. While the transhistorical nature of the mythical form is of interest, and the shifting ideology within the seemingly eternal nature of the tales allows an insight into the current dominant ideological paradigm with regard to gender and nation, this study will focus specifically on the way the tale has been adapted and appropriated from within the English tradition, hence the emphasis on ideologies of Englishness.

The earliest origins of the Arthuriad have been located in Britain, and while some scraps of manuscript remain from the earliest Welsh traditions it is Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136) that is the basis for much of the literature produced in England within the last nine hundred years.¹ In Norman-ruled England it mattered that Arthur was seen as English, as he provided a stability to the newly conquered nation, and Arthur was later written into the genealogies of subsequent monarchs to strengthen their claim to the English throne.² While Arthur would have been a Briton, and consequently not English,³ the historical accuracy of many facets of Arthuriana have been subverted for ideological purposes. This thesis will investigate whether Arthurian literature has been ideological in function since its inception, and whether, while this ideology has shifted to reflect the changing dominant political discourses throughout the centuries, it remains a prominent and essential feature of the tales and underpins their continued appeal.

The stories of Camelot were appropriated by child readers from the earliest days of children's literature when, during the Age of Reason, the supernatural and mystical elements were considered unsuitable material for adult readers.⁴ In Chapter Three, the history of the tales will be examined to establish how they came to be perceived as appropriate for young readers through popular tales such as those of Tom Thumb and Jack the Giant Killer. This thesis will discuss the ways in which, through the didactic function of these stories, a tale of incest, adultery, bloodlust and hunger for power came to be seen as suitable reading for children. The way the tales are handled by writers of fiction for adults and children is markedly different, and while Arthurian fiction for adults has received substantial scholarly attention, a comprehensive study of the tales written for children has not been undertaken. Discussions of the effect of the category of children's hero quest narratives and Arthuriana for the child reader have been conducted by Yarrow (2004), Hourihan (1997), Stephens (1992) and Stephens and McCallum (1998), yet these do not

¹ Such as the eleventh century *Culhwch ac Olwen*, (Bromwich, 1959).

² This happens in the 1400s, when both houses in the War of the Roses claimed Arthur as an ancestor to legitimise their own claim to the throne.

³ 'English' has come to be defined as of Anglo-Saxon descent.

⁴ Within this context, the Age of Reason is considered to be the long eighteenth century from 1660-1815, in which cultural and literary movements reflect the sensibilities described above.

provide close textual analysis of any specific texts. The aim of this work is to counter this, and provide an analysis of genre, gender and nation within the Arthuriad as produced for children.

Retellings for adults have a general tendency to be more progressive than those produced for the child reader,⁵ and reflect the more diverse range of gender roles available within modern society. Children's fiction is more problematic with regard to the representation of gender, and many contemporary children's authors reflect normative gender roles and I will argue the maintenance of Englishness is interconnected.

While the constructed 'other', usually a desirous female or a destabilising patriarch, may change through the generations, Arthur's essential Englishness, and the construction of a retro-sexism which helps to maintain this, is a prominent feature of both visual and literary texts. This thesis will explore this phenomenon, and examine a range of genres, by male and female authors, to examine the gender models presented to a young audience and the potential effect this may have on a society which, according to Walter (2010), is witnessing a return of casual sexism. One aim of this work is to examine whether Arthuriana offers a special site for the retro-sexist and nationalist ideologies to flourish through the combination of historical authority and mythical speech.

1.1 Interrogating myth and the transhistorical nature of Arthuriana

Myths are found in all cultures, as both ancient and modern tales, but regardless of their origins they all serve a similar purpose: to offer an explanation of the world in which we live. As Saxby (2004: 166) explains '[a]t the heart of mythology – a story – is imagination, creativity, the urge to understand, explain and to embellish' (*italics in the original*). Myths serve to explain natural phenomena, and the behaviour of human beings, our nature and society. Using supernatural elements, myths explain the apparently unexplainable, but more importantly, as Stephens (2010: 214) argues, they become exemplars for all human life, lending religious or spiritual

⁵ See both Stephens and McCallum (1998) for a discussion of the different use of myth by adult and children's authors.

value, and as such they carry significance beyond that of mere story. This is one function of myth, but as Wood (2008: 6) suggests, ‘a category like myth has a wide range of meaning. It can refer to a sacred narrative and to something that is not true’. It is the supposition of this thesis that this range of meaning can become confused, so the Arthurian myth, based on a pseudo-history, has become equated in the popular imagination with the sacred.

While suffused with supernatural and religious significance, the continuance of a myth is borne out of a culture’s need to fill a gap in knowledge and to provide reasons for the shape of that culture. As such, myths come to be seen as ‘not the creation of any one person’ but rather as ‘universal [...] everyone’s creation and everyone’s property’ (Lupton, 2000: 32). This statement only reflects that working of myth to an extent and overlooks the work of ideology within all texts, but particularly within myth. As Wynne-Davies (1996: 6) argues of the women in the *Arthuriad*, their ‘characters are not part of an unchanging Arthurian myth, but [are] closely tied to the material circumstances that existed for women at the time in which the books were written’. One possible result of the apparent transhistorical nature of the tales is that fluctuations in the representation of gender and nation may be overlooked by many readers. Consequently, the ideology appears falsely retrospective. Readers may fail to identify the nature of the ideology within a text, not as recounting the way things were, but rather indicating the way society *should* operate. Such a reader position suggests a naivety with regard to the way ideology in literature functions, the effect of myth, and the historical foundations for Arthur, something likely to be more common amongst inexperienced child readers (Applebee, 1978).

Arthuriana has its origins in the sixth century battle of Mount Badon. An unnamed warlord makes his appearance in historical records from this period, and by circa 610 the *Gododdin*, a collection of Welsh language texts, makes reference to a warrior being ‘no Arthur’ which suggests that Arthur’s legend long precedes the supernatural tales with which most readers would be familiar.⁶ Most of the early

⁶ For a timeline of Arthuriana throughout the medieval period, see Shepherd (ed.) (2004: pp. xvii – xix).

references to Arthur are of Welsh origin, but at this stage he remains a warrior, rather than a king. It is with the advent of the English tradition, and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie* that the story of Arthur as it is known in contemporary culture began to develop. Shepherd (2004: xvii-xviii) argues that it is Geoffrey's tale which 'produces a combination of features of Arthur's story that will form the basis of much subsequent Arthurian literature' including the prophecies of Merlin, the Roman campaign,⁷ and Arthur's retreat to the Isle of Avalon, which promises his eventual return and the inescapable link to Christian imagery that later becomes such a prominent part of the tales.

While it has been adapted over the centuries there have been no new motif developments within the English tradition since Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. As such it has a distinctly English character and Arthur's Englishness arguably reinforces his place as an ideological mainstay of the argument in support of the superiority of the white European male.⁸ As Baron (2001: xi) argues, 'fifteen centuries of celebration in myth, legend, chronicle, epic, romance, drama, opera and film have engraved [his name] upon the national consciousness as if England and Arthur are one'. When this statement is considered in light of Reynolds' (2004: 18) assertion that 'the stories cultures choose to preserve and repeat serve a purpose' then a probable connection between the evolution of the Arthuriad and the dominant ideologies of Western culture begins to emerge. This may have an influence over not only ideas of nation, but also over the desirable traits of masculinity and femininity represented in such tales. This thesis will examine a range of historical and contemporary texts, and engage with the debate surrounding these issues within children's literature, including those identified by Hourihan (1997: 12), who suggests:

[t]he hero story is a myth in both the traditional sense and the sense in which Roland Barthes uses the term in *Mythologies* to describe the way certain stories and images function to shape our perception of reality. For Barthes, myths are omnipresent signs which impose upon us the belief that something simply 'goes without saying; they create a perception of the falsely obvious' (Barthes [1957] 1973: 11).

⁷ Through the depiction of the slaying of the giant this episode is reworked into the tales of Jack the Giant Killer.

⁸ For examples on this argument see Hourihan (1997).

It is this acceptance of the falsely obvious which creates the perception that contemporary Arthurian material is not a purveyor of sexism, as it is simply portraying how things were. Saxby (2004:170) suggests that all myths carry ‘an inherent moral’, and Arthurian texts are no exception to this. As Barthes (1970b: 140) explains ‘[m]yth has in fact a double function; it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand and it imposes it on us’. Arthurian material, due to its unique history, provides an ideal forum for discussing this double function, particularly with regard to gender and nationalist ideologies.

1.2 Theoretical Approaches

The exploration of this selection of texts, representative of children’s Arthuriana, will employ a range of theoretical approaches. This range of approaches will be used with the intention of revealing layers of meaning and exploring alternative reader stances in order to ascertain possible messages received by the child reader as part of the process of creating textual meaning. The majority of the approaches that will be used are part of a feminist critical discourse analysis, which will be discussed shortly; some areas, including gender, nation and genre, require separate attention.

1.2.1 Gender: *feminism and postfeminism*

Gender defines the effect on, and depiction of, both males and females within a traditionally drawn gender binary. While much of the material covered in this thesis has an equally restrictive model of gender to offer to male readers, the primary concern of this thesis is the impact on female readers, and the representation of women within the texts analysed. Some attention is paid to the psychodynamic process of gender representations, to explore the masculine as part of the ideological motivation for the continuation of Arthuriana within the twenty-first century. The role of the male in Arthuriana, from the perspective of chivalrous and knightly conduct, has been explored with regard to the historical texts. While this would be an interesting area for further study with regard to contemporary children’s Arthurian fiction, this thesis is particularly concerned with the interrelationship between men and women, and specific depictions of the feminine. Consequently it

is necessary to understand how feminist and postfeminist theories will be utilised in this discussion.

Feminism is a nebulous term, defined by the *Collins Dictionary* (2014) as ‘a doctrine or movement that advocates equal rights for women’. This is only a partial definition though, as it removes feminism from its social, cultural and historical context, and defines it as a unified movement with agreed aims, rather than more correctly as ‘feminisms’. This thesis is particularly interested in proto-feminism, the suffragist movement and third-wave feminism, but by the nature of the fluidity of feminisms it also takes into account the second wave feminist movement and the contemporary view of post-feminism.

Shoemaker (1998: 5-6) discusses the rise of proto-feminism and the suffragist movement between 1650 and 1850, stating that ‘the emergence of a class society, with an increasingly prominent middle class [led to] a sharpening of the differences between male and female social roles’. He goes on to argue that ‘feminist thinkers during the period 1650-1850 developed visions of femininity and masculinity which were unprecedented in terms of the similarities of the characteristics possessed by each sex and in their challenge to male superiority and privilege’ (*ibid*: 56). The suffragist movement throughout the nineteenth century is well documented,⁹ with the push for emancipation and female education, and the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857), to name but a few of the changes women were pursuing in this period. Because of the radical social change it sought, even in its emergent phase the suffragist movement alienated some women from the cause, with Queen Victoria being an ardent supporter of the continuation of patriarchal rule. It is perhaps then unsurprising that as the feminist movement was galvanised under first wave feminism at the beginning of the twentieth century it also began to fracture into plural feminisms.

Second wave feminism, spanning the 1960s and 1970s, became less concerned with the rights fought for in the early days of the suffragist movement and first-wave feminism, which achieved female emancipation, the right to education and the right to own property. Rather, the focus became more militant, as second wave feminists

⁹ As discussed in the Tennyson section of Chapter Two.

pushed for equal rights with men in the work place and in the home, and for legislation to enable them to have control over their bodies, including reproductive rights, and to work in a system which allowed equal jobs for equal pay. One aim of second-wave feminism was to discover the cause of women's subjugation and to understand the culturally created notion of gender. This led to a popular view of feminists as seeking the subjection of men, and the rise of the have-it-all generation. As a result of this a significant backlash occurred (Faludi, 1991) and third-wave feminism emerged.

Third-wave feminists, while benefitting from the legislative changes enabled by first and second-wave feminism, felt that there was still work that had not been accomplished by the previous movements, and as a result began to move towards implementing these changes, with a greater emphasis than second wave feminism on race and class.¹⁰ This movement from second-wave feminism was arguably only possible due to the greater economic and social status of women, status only achieved through the direct result of second-wave activism. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2014) explains that third-wave feminists:

grew up with the expectation of achievement and examples of female success as well as an awareness of the barriers presented by sexism, racism, and classism. They chose to battle such obstacles by inverting sexist, racist, and classist symbols, fighting patriarchy with irony, answering violence with stories of survival, and combating continued exclusion with grassroots activism and radical democracy. Rather than becoming part of the "machine," third wavers began both sabotaging and rebuilding the machine itself.

As Rampton (2014) suggests, 'many constructs have been destabilized, including the notions of "universal womanhood," body, gender, sexuality' and within this the subversion of patriarchal norms through the representation of the body in ways which first and second-wave feminists associated with male oppression. A great deal of the momentum behind third-wave feminism focussed on cultural models of femininity, arguing against sexist depictions in magazines, television, and other avenues of popular culture. This thesis aims to explore the cultural implications of

¹⁰ Although many women still feel that race and class are added on to feminism in tokenistic efforts, and as such feminism fails to address many of the concerns members of these groups still have.

retro-sexist and anti-feminist models within children's culture, as an extension of the work of third-wave feminism. Despite the third-wave focus on socialisation, Judith Butler's work on performativity (1990) and the discourse which has opened up surrounding the continuum of gendered identities, the majority of texts within Arthuriana remain firmly entrenched in traditional ideas of a gender binary, rooted in the notion of essentialism, a theory called in to question by post-structuralist second-wave feminists, such as Butler.

The expansion of feminism to include issues of race and class is often argued by third-wave feminists to be its greatest strength. However, its detractors argue that this is in fact its greatest weakness, as it has led to a large and nebulous movement which seemingly disagrees on many important issues. The role of the mother, and the sexualisation of women, have become particularly contentious issues, and both will be explored within the context of this thesis. Partly as a result of the apparently fractured nature of feminism(s) and as a result of the backlash against feminism, there has arisen a postfeminist movement which argues that legislation has done all it can, and it is up to the individual woman to seize the opportunities this presents.

Postfeminism sees women in positions of power as success stories which demonstrate the ability of all women to achieve their goals:

[p]ostfeminism is best understood as a distinctive sensibility, made up of a number of interrelated themes. These include the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference (Gill, 2007).

Postfeminism, like feminism, has its detractors, and yet it provides an interesting discussion point for the exploration of female agency and the representation of powerful and subversive women. Consequently both the theories of feminism and postfeminism will inform this reading of children's Arthuriana, and will be read in conjunction with theories of genre and nation.

1.2.2 *Nation*

Yuval-Davis (1997: 3) describes nation as being formed in groups of 'sub-, super- and cross-states, as the boundaries of nations almost never coincide with those of

so called “nation-states”. Within academia there has been little attention paid to the role of women within the formation of nations as they are more usually seen as occupying the private sphere and consequently of little political relevance. This is paradoxical as the primordialist’s school of thought argues that nations are a natural and universal phenomenon which are an ‘automatic extension of kinship relations’ (*ibid*: 1). These kinship relationships are usually based around traditional divisions of labour, which coincide with Victorian ideals that the men protect the ‘womenandchildren’ [sic] (Enloe, 1991). This is problematic though, as ‘constructions of nationhood usually involve specific notions of both “manhood” and “womanhood”’ (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 1). Consequently, it is difficult to separate nationalist ideologies from those of gender and more particularly with cultural and social expectations placed on men and women. Nations are cultural constructs, and Yuval-Davis prefers the term ‘collectivities’ to that of nation, as nations can exist both within and beyond the borders of the nation state, and are more closely aligned to the ideological and cultural sympathies shared by a group of people. This is supported by Anderson (1983: 7), who suggests that a nation ‘is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign’. A nation has no clear community as most members of a nation never meet, and may have diverse interests. Consequently, cultural construction is key to the experience of gender and nation, and consequently the textual representation of each can play a role in the reimagining of these ideologies.

1.2.3 Genre

Genre is significant in a reader’s construction of meaning as it impacts on the way in which a text is approached. For example, a science fiction text is expected to comprise innovative ideas, exploring the frontiers of science or involving itself with social organisation in a different way to a historical text. Historical texts, while fictitious representations, aim to create a sense of the era, the events and the characters in accordance with historical documentation. They are frequently intensely researched and attempt to capture a moment in history, expanded through the imagination of the author. Historicist novels, such as those written by Hoffman and Morpurgo, are not historical but draw on the weight of an implied or assumed history for a sense of authority. In literary terms this can be related to medievalism

and seen as the recall of a past age to comment on the morality and ideology of the author's contemporaneous society. However, genre has a subtlety to it which is belied by this definition.

One branch of genre studies argues that 'we are inevitably, though perhaps unwittingly, responding to generic signals [because] genre [...] functions much like a code of behaviour established between the author and his reader' (Dubrow, 1982: 2). This draws on Derrida's (1980: 219) theory, which argues that:

[a]s soon as the word "genre" is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: "Do", "Do not", says "genre", the word "genre", the figure, the voice, or the law of genre.

Such definitions see genre as limiting, as stifling the author's individual voice and creativity, and reducing the number of possible readings open to a text's audience. In recent years the approach to genre theory has changed, as the term 'genre' has become part of everyday parlance, and as such is once again viewed as a useful area of exploration for literary scholars.

This reversal has arisen from the view that:

[e]ven in the case of prose, as Barthes points out, modern literature seeks constantly to avoid being taken up in the myth of literature. Every literary movement of modern times has been an attempt to reduce literary language to a simple semiological system (ordinary language), and to repudiate Literature as a mythical sign, the sign of Culture (Gossman, 1990: 252).

Consequently, in rejecting genre as an overt system of communication, authors have allowed for its reintroduction as a serious means of understanding a text. Viewed in light of implicit and explicit ideology,¹¹ the continuation of an overtly rejected genre which still appears in a text allows a better understanding of the ideology which underpins the writing. As Dubrow (1982: 95) argues 'all works must be read in relation to the literary system in which they occur, just as all linguistic utterances must be interpreted according to the rules of their *langue*'. Drawing on the use of Saussurean linguistics in both myth and intertextuality, as defined by Barthes and Kristeva respectively, we may begin to understand that language and our understanding of it in any form, be that oral, pictorial or written, is limited by our

¹¹ Explained in more detail on pp.13-14.

cultural initiation into the system of the sign, signifier, and signified. Each means something to the interlocutor as a result of the cultural associations placed on elements in the process of signification. An overt rejection of genre does not remove generic conventions as they are defined by semiotics, but rather they are displaced, layered but still present. Understanding this semiological process allows genre to be viewed not as a definitive or limiting term but as an exploration of ‘how elements of that [generic] form govern the reading of the work’ (Dubrow, 1982: 96).

1.3 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

The core theoretical framework for this thesis utilizes feminist critical discourse analysis, including an exploration of the use of ideology, intertextuality and psychoanalytic theory. This thesis adopts the position that ‘[i]deology is never separable from discourse’ (Stephens, 1992: 2) and suggests that this is the case in both adults’ and children’s literature. While this is a stance which many scholars would agree with, it is arguable that ideology in children’s literature has a particular function which has a greater influence on readers than that present in adult’s literature. It not only influences the material that is written for children, but to some extent shapes the material which is available for them to appropriate. Adult texts such as the Arthurian texts discussed in this thesis have been adapted for the child reader but also appropriated by them. This thesis suggests that appropriated texts tend to reinforce and reiterate the preferred gender and national ideologies and along with these present the illusion of the superiority of the ‘White Male’, as detailed by Hourihan (1997). Such depictions create a sense of all who do not fit this profile as being ‘othered’, outside mainstream political discourse and in many ways deficient. This view of the ‘other’ is reinforced through a great deal of adult literature, but it is introduced in children’s literature as part of the child reader’s socialization into Western culture. As Stephens and McCallum (1998: 3) explain:

[w]hen compared with general literature, the literature produced for children contains a much larger proportion of retold stories [...] Under the guise of offering children access to strange and exciting worlds removed from everyday experiences, they serve to initiate children into aspects of a social heritage, transmitting many of a culture’s central values and assumptions and a body of shared allusions and experiences.

Ideology in children's fiction is not only ever-present, its function is to socialize children into the normative gender and cultural roles shaped by a largely conservative community of literary gatekeepers.

The effect of this, as noted by Pinsent (1997) and Hourihan (1997), is the marginalisation of certain readers, and this is supported in gender terms by a contemporary educational establishment which is conspicuously aware of a failure among boys to engage with literature, and a reluctance amongst many young male readers to approach a text which they perceive to be 'girly'. This is combined with a view that girls have the capacity to read androgynously, and to happily approach 'male' texts and identify with the protagonist, regardless of the gender of the focalizer (Pinsent, 1997: 76). This has led critics to assert that young female readers are not only marginalised through the ideology in literature, but forced to be complicit in their own marginalisation through socialisation and educational practices, although this has been disputed, as it implies that all readers approach a text in the same way.¹² While the ideology of children's literature may be more overtly didactic than that for adult readers, it is not a simple matter of authorial intention being found and followed by the child reader. As Cocks (2004: 94) argues, 'a thing is only meaningful if it is received' and the way in which authors embed ideology into their texts has a significant role in the receptiveness of the reader to the author's message.

This view is a marked departure from Barthes' (1967) view of Zero Degree writing. It could be argued that the authors of children's texts are never invisible, and they can never remove their own socialisation from the ideology they relay in their work. As Hollindale (1988: 31) suggests:

[t]here is no act of self-censorship by which a writer can exclude or disguise the essential self. Sometimes, moreover, the conscious surface ideology and the passive ideology of a novel are at odds with each other, and official ideas contradicted by unconscious assumptions.

This serves to highlight that ideology in children's literature functions on two levels: the implicit and explicit. The use of implicit and explicit ideology as terms allows for a differentiation between intentional, didactic ideology, and passive

¹² This will be discussed later in this chapter.

unconscious assumptions which are unthinkingly reproduced. Fairclough's (2001: 21) model of this process situates both the author and the reader within this process (see Appendix A). The text in this model can be said to contain traces of the conscious or unconscious ideology of authorial intent, which are interpreted by the reader through ideological 'cues' embedded in the text. Conscious cues result from explicit ideology, which can be interpreted as didacticism, while unconscious cues are the result of the author's socialisation into dominant cultural norms, representing unconsidered assumptions regarding issues such as gender, race, and nation. These processes of production and interpretation, both in terms of the inner box, representing the text, and the outer box, representing the social context in which a text is produced and interpreted, form the basis of discourse. Without this two part process of production and interpretation ideology is powerless. This model of production and interpretation provides a starting point, however it requires further analysis, as children's literature acts a distinct type of discourse, with a marked power imbalance between the reader and the gatekeepers of the genre.

It is explicit ideology which conveys the conscious practice or policy of authors as they construct their narrative. In texts where the aim is overtly didactic, such as that by Morpurgo,¹³ and in a very different way Jones' text,¹⁴ it is evident that this explicit ideology can take different forms. The explicit ideology is intended to support the traditional conservatism of children's Arthuriana, or to challenge these assumptions, and authors intend their audience to recognise and then respond to the explicit, or surface, ideology. It is at this level that ideology can work to challenge the dominant paradigm and to introduce new ideas to the child reader. Explicit ideology can thus be argued to reveal authorial intent, and while this may provoke a resistance in the child reader, the greatest difficulty faced in the transmission of new ideas through this surface ideology is that it often fails to permeate the text, being undermined by the authors themselves. Pinsent (1997: 23) suggests that '[e]ven when writers are trying to be neutral, something not very frequent in the case of politically sensitive issues such as gender and race, their underlying

¹³ Discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

¹⁴ Discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

assumptions will colour what they consider to be impartiality'. These underlying assumptions are evident in the implicit, passive ideology of a text.

Implicit ideology reveals the 'assumed social structures and habits of thought' of an author (Stephens, 1992: 9). These are potentially much more powerful and persuasive messages than those revealed on the surface of a text. These 'implicit, and therefore invisible, ideological positions are invested with legitimacy through the implication that things are simply "so"' (*ibid*). They reveal the socialization of the author, the deeply ingrained ideas of the way things are and the ways things should be. Implicit ideology may reveal an author's assumptions about race, nation, class and many other aspects of cultural and social structures which remain surprisingly unchanged in contemporary children's Arthuriana. Stephens (1992: 2) explains:

[i]deology is implicit in the way the story the audience derives from a text exists as an isomorph of events in the actual world: even if the story's events are wholly or partly impossible in actuality, narrative sequences and character interrelationships will be shaped according to recognizable forms, and that shaping can in itself express ideology in so far as it implies assumption about the forms of human existence.

While this acknowledges the role of wider socialization which cannot be ignored when examining readers' responses to these texts, Stephens (*ibid.*) goes on to state 'fiction must be regarded as a special site for ideological effect, with a potentially powerful capacity for shaping audience attitudes'. This would suggest that while literature shapes and affects child readers' view of the world, much of what they read reinforces the dominant political ideology which situates so many readers as 'other'. Implicit ideology is powerful, as it reinforces readers' assumptions from their previous reading and their wider cultural experience. Yet Hollindale (1988: 35) argues that '[w]here the ideology is explicit, it does not matter how morally unanswerable the substance is if it speaks persuasively only to those who are persuaded already, leaving others with their own divergent ideology intensified by resentful bemusement'. If the purpose of ideology in children's literature is to persuade and socialise, it is necessary to explore its impact on the child reader, and the narratorial techniques employed to guide the reader toward the desired meaning.

1.3.1 *The Implied Reader and the Implied Author*

There are studies which seek to examine how the actual child reader responds to texts, and these are of use to anyone wishing to study children's literature. This thesis draws on some of this research. However, it does not seek to examine the actual child reader; rather it will take a theoretical perspective on the implied author and the implied reader in order to situate the theoretical child reader within the textual discourse. Of course, not all readers will find the author's desired meaning, and others will find it and dismiss it as not relating to their lived experience. Readings which subvert the author's intended meaning are interesting avenues for academic exploration, but they are not within the scope of this thesis; the purpose of this thesis is to examine the wider implications of the child reader of Arthuriana in so far as it relates to the *implied* reader.¹⁵ While Hollindale (1988: 20) argues that the 'same book may mean different things to different children' in the wider context of children's literature, Koch (2001: 157) explores this within the framework of the medievalism which pervades children's Arthuriana, explaining that the:

imaginary aspects of constructions of 'the medieval' are one of the central problems of medievalism. Even if the imaginary is understood as a reservoir of culturally shared fantasies, anxieties and desires, the act of giving shape and meaning to currents of the imaginary is individual and thereby to a certain degree subjective.

While authors will write from the perspective of their internalised social and cultural assumptions, readers will approach a text from theirs, and as such it is problematic to define the meaning readers will draw from a text. From a theoretical perspective it is possible to argue that a significant percentage of readers are likely to encounter a text in a given way and this is largely as a result of the way in which the less experienced child reader is likely to approach a text.

Barthes (1967) argues that there are two types of text, the writerly text and the readerly text, which construct two kinds of reader; the writerly and the readerly. Many texts, particularly those written for children, tend to be readerly texts, and therefore do not require their readers to decode or question the material contained.

¹⁵ To explore subversive readings, it would be necessary to undertake a wide ranging survey of actual reader responses to the text, and this thesis is more explicitly interested in the author's ideology and the desired reader response.

Such texts are not challenging in terms of narrative structure, ideological content, or plot devices. This style of text is frequently employed in the retelling of traditional and familiar narratives, such as Arthurian texts, which, while containing layers of intertextuality, negotiate this by containing all the meaning that the reader needs to enjoy the story, leaving little scope for subversive or alternative interpretations.¹⁶ Naturally, some readers will read beyond and challenge the message of such tales, but readerly readers are arguably less knowledgeable readers, and less attuned to authorial devices which may cue them to recognize the ideology that the text contains.

Writerly texts are much more demanding in terms of narrative structure, plot devices and characterisation. They will still contain the author's unconscious social assumptions, but the meaning is more open-ended, and a wider variety of possible meanings are available to the reader. Where readerly texts are based on metanarratives, writerly texts often interrogate these, and situate the reader as an active participant in the co-construction of meaning. These texts destabilize meaning and question the reader's assumptions. Such an active reading style is difficult for the reader to adopt, and many adult readers do not achieve this, often because this is not a desirable reading position.¹⁷ Broadly speaking it is possible to argue that children's authors and publishers have traditionally assumed that children prefer to read readerly texts, which clearly situate them within the narrative and guide them toward a desired meaning.

In constructing meaning in children's literature there is a more complex relationship between the author and the reader than thus far explained. Seymour Chatman (1978: 151, cited in Wall, 1991: 4) provides a model for this relationship (see Appendix B). The real author and the real reader do not exist in the text; rather it is the implied author, through the narrator, who speaks to, and conveys meaning to, the implied reader through the narratee. Wall (1991: 4) explains that the real people involved in the reading process:

are the physical parties in the transaction, whose existence cannot be legislated away by theories of narration, for without them there would be no

¹⁶ See Chapter Two for a discussion of how Sutcliff and Cooper negotiate this issue.

¹⁷ This may be the case if, as many people chose to, reading is seen as escapism.

transaction, nor any reason for the transaction – but they are not the parties to be found within the pages of the book.

While both parties are key in the understanding and decoding of meaning within a text, the real author, or the real author's intention, is of more interest to this discussion than the real reader for the reasons given above. Both Wall (1991) and Chatman (1978) agree that the narrator can be the implied author, and the clearer the presence of the narrator the more apparent the narratee, or implied reader.

It is widely acknowledged by critics, including Cocks (2004), Stephens and McCallum (1998), and Pinsent (1997), that a text makes clear the *kind* of reader expected by the author through textual traces primarily relating to the protagonist with whom the reader is meant to identify. The child reader is widely assumed to be two years younger than the protagonist and to identify with the experiences and opinions of this character. While this mode of reading is relatively new, as traditionally children would have appropriated material written for an adult audience, its impact has resulted in the protagonist-as-focalizer being frequently interpreted as the child in the book, and to embody the implied reader of a given text. In order to realise the meaning of a text the child reader must identify with this implied reader, and subsume his/her real self in order to fully immerse themselves into the world of the narrative. While critics, such as Pinsent (1997: 24), acknowledge that it is not possible to predetermine which character within a text any given reader may identify with, once they have 'he or she may well be disproportionately influenced by some feature of that character'. This influence is powerful, and acts on an ideological and unconscious level.

Empirical studies of child reader response show that many child readers can, and do, resist the apparent imperative to subsume the self by complete identification with the textual focalizer.¹⁸ However, the inexperience of some child readers, and their inclination to approach a text in a readerly manner, means that this immersion in a text, the identification with the focalizer, could have a lasting effect, particularly when the assumptions and actions of the focalizer concur with those of the dominant social paradigm. Consequently exposure to a limited range of reading material has

¹⁸ Studies such as this have been carried out by Applebee (1978), Grenby (2008) and Cullingford (1998).

an increased likelihood of producing agreement with the dominant ideology of a text which replicates retro-sexist and outdated views.

Stephens (1992) includes a discussion of this phenomenon and its interrelationship with the reception of ideological meaning. He argues that 'total identification with the focalizer is a strategy for reading widely encouraged in schools' (*ibid*: 68). Such a reading strategy is employed within education in order to encourage students to develop their imagination, directing them to consider how they would feel if they were the protagonist, and exploring the events and emotions experienced by a given character. Because of the previously discussed reluctance of boys to approach any text they perceive to have been written for a female audience, this teaching practice encourages girls to empathize with the culture of dichotomous and limiting portrayals of women, and to socialize them into the dominant ideological heteronormative stance which situates women as 'other'. Stephens (*ibid*: 68-9) explains that this identification with the focalizer is significant as '[r]eading establishes a relationship between the reader and a potential alter ego, the focalizer(s), but also a relationship between the reader and the reader's own selfhood'. Authors use narrative techniques to guide their actual reader to identify with the text's desired reader, and in so doing limit the number of potential meanings that a text contains, thus the actual reader and the actual author communicate through the voice of the author in the text and the implied reader.

This is problematic for many reasons, not least of which is the essentially conservative nature of much of children's literature, but particularly children's Arthuriana. The medievalism and the imaginative shorthand this includes manipulates the expectations of readers, and messages are more likely to be received if they fulfil reader expectations. The phenomenon of recreating outdated, potentially racist and retro-sexist ideologies in reworkings of Arthurian material for children is arguably the result of the powerful psychological and cultural effect of myth.

1.3.2 *Psychology of Myth*

Barthes (1970b: 133) terms mythical speech a process, arguing that '[m]ythical speech is made up of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it

suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth [...] presuppose a signifying consciousness' (italics in the original). Material, whether written, oral or pictorial, must pre-exist the myth making process. Because the literary Arthurian tradition began with Geoffrey in the medieval period, his text and those of the medieval authors whom he preceded are not usually viewed as a form of mythical speech. However, Tolhurst (2010) argues that, in taking a folkloric tale and working it as a representation which rejected the traditional medieval paradigm, Geoffrey of Monmouth was in fact a mythmaker. This myth takes on the status of 'truth' as successive generations of monarchs sought to use the text to bolster their claim to the throne. Such a process demonstrates that, in its function as a myth, the Arthurian tales became seen as part of the universally true fabric of human existence, belonging equally to its writers and readers, and becoming an interwoven part of the fabric of wider cultural practices. Myth as reproduced in children's literature can thus be argued to not only illustrate and highlight desired gendered and national behaviours, it places the reader, the receiver of the message embedded in mythical speech, under an obligation to believe and accept the ideologies as they stand in a given text. It is perfectly possible for the author of a mythical work to intend to redress the ideological balance and inspire the child reader to question the material formerly or subsequently encountered. A close examination will consider whether this authorial intent succeeds in permeating beyond the surface level of the text. Thus the mythical and the ideological work together; this can be read into the medievalism which much of children's Arthuriana employs. Stephens (1992: 112) argues that medievalism:

involves the invention of an alterity of time and place which, although more primitive, is also somehow nobler, and of a society whose beliefs, structures, rules and obligations are clearer and more open than those of the society inhabited by the writers and their audiences.

While each author will utilise medievalism in different ways, it is still possible to argue that medievalism poses as 'the underlying, unchanging nature of mankind' (*ibid.*). The notion of the universality of human nature, the unchanging and universally true codes of moral and social position, can be read not only into the psychological impetus which underpins the continuation of mythical literature, but in the stereotypical characters generally portrayed therein.

One of the reasons for the use of stereotypical characters who function as plot devices is the overlap they provide with the expectations of a child reader already familiar with these traditions. As Pinsent (1997: 23) suggests, 'it does seem that at an early stage in their development children gain reading confidence through the conviction that their expectations about a character will be fulfilled'. The characters which fulfil the child reader's expectations are often archetypes. Hancock (2005: 48) suggests that:

[o]ne of the characters, usually the hero, can be seen as representing the ego – from whose perspective the text is focalized. Other characters or settings whether represented as human, animal, inanimate objects, form archetypal images which enact elements of the unconscious. The goal of the text as psychodynamic process is 'individuation', that is, the integration of the conscious and unconscious elements, through realization of the 'self'

The 'self' that is to be 'realised' is that which society requires of the implied reader. It is arguable that White European male readers will determine their place as superior through the embodiment of traditional male attributes, and readers who are not of this type will see themselves as 'other', inherently inferior by virtue of their lack of these attributes. While the stereotypes have remained similar in form, their representations have shifted in accordance with the nature of myth.

Myths may appear universal and unchanging, but they act to preserve and reinscribe values which societies choose to transmit to the next generation. Consequently, myths alter subtly with cultural shifts. This is significant as writers of contemporary Arthuriana lay claim to the authority of medieval texts in order to create a sense of the unchanging nature of the myth, and as such justify racial and gendered representations which are no longer concomitant with views of contemporary society. In overtly claiming a recreation of Malory's text, many authors create retro-sexist images which they claim exist in their primary inter-text. However intertextuality has a complexity to it which is reduced by these claims and this complexity is increased due to the nature of mythical speech.

1.3.3 Intertextuality

While some contemporary reworkings of the *Arthuriad*, such as Jones' (1993) *Hexwood* and Reeve's (2007) *Here Lies Arthur*, loosely base their narratives on the

core motifs of Arthuriana with little reference to the canonical texts, these innovative texts are in the minority. It is more usual to find that authors, such as Morpurgo and Green, rework the core characters and defining moments of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* into a pseudo-historical setting. Many of these texts do nothing which strikes the reader as particularly innovative, but are often well told and read by actual children. This has led Stephens (1992: 112) to suggest 'that a work which employs the discourse of medievalism must consciously interrogate its own intertextuality in order to avoid the fallacy of "unchanged human nature" and to confront the social construction of significance'. The function of medievalism is to comment on the values of the time in which the text was written, and to compare the perceived decadence and sliding standards of contemporary society unfavourably with this non-existent past. On an ideological level this medievalism serves to induct the reader into a code of behavior akin to the morals and codes of conduct of a bygone age, an age which even Malory, writing in the medieval period, saw as outdated.

It has been argued by Wimsatt (1994: 213) that Malory's text can be read as a satire on knightly conduct, yet subsequent generations of authors who claim Malory as their primary inter-text seem to overlook this, or misread his text, in order to utilize the authority this inter-text transposes onto their own work. In retellings of myth this works on an ideological level to socialize young readers into a culture. Stories presented as reworkings of myth possess a psychological influence which is not as apparent in other, newer, forms of literature, because they are imbued with a sense of the universality of human nature and human societies.

Interrogating universality and the use of medievalism is problematic in children's literature, although it has been attempted by authors of texts for an adult market, as authors and gatekeepers pursue marketable texts. Texts which interrogate the dominant themes and motifs of the genre become writerly texts. Writerly books frequently become books which literary adults approve of but which real child readers ignore. However, the majority of Arthurian children's literature, particularly that which incorporates medievalism, does not interrogate its intertextuality. As a result it produces what Bakhtin terms monologic intertextuality: intertextuality which contains one voice, typically one which

represents a top-down, hierarchical, universal truth, which leaves little room for readers to produce alternative interpretations of a text. Allen (2000: 19) explains the idea of monologic intertextuality as one which seems to offer a clarity of meaning. Supposedly monologic texts may use the same plot devices, motifs, and in some cases the same words as the inter-text, but they speak to and from a different social context. As such a singular interpretation such as that alluded to by the term monologic intertextuality is a simplification of the intertextual relationship.

Intertextuality is more than the reference of one text in another, however detailed this reference may be. Julia Kristeva, elaborating on Bakhtin's work and drawing on the work of structural linguists such as Saussure by utilising the terms metonymy and metaphor, added a third process to intertextuality. She argued that intertextuality is not merely the placement of one idea within another, but a transference. It 'involves an altering of the thetic *position* - the destruction of the old formation and the formation of a new one' (Kristeva, 1986: 111, italics in the original).¹⁹ This shifting of thetic position reveals that monologism is an illusion, created by authorial intent to give significance to the text.

This provides an interesting parallel between intertextuality and the psychology of myth, particularly in terms of a tale being 'seized' by mythical speech. Barthes (1970b: 137) argues that myths are:

constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it *is a second-order semiological system*. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second [...] the materials of mythical speech [...] are reduced to pure signifying functions as soon as they are caught by myth (italics in the original).

Myth then has no form or function without that lent to it by the signifier and signified functions of language as defined by Saussurean linguists (see Appendix C). Myth is a total of linguistic signs, shifted sideways, so all the meaning of mythical speech is built into the form and structure, carrying within it the weight of historical association with the system of semiological, or semiotic, signs and

¹⁹ The thetic phase is that in which the signification between word and concept is formed, thus forming a thetic relationship between word and symbol. A shift in thetic position is the change between this originally formed concept to create new symbolic significance between word or construct and the cultural or contextual meaning ascribed to it.

signifiers. The meaning itself comes not from the myth, but from the signification of the mythical form. This contributes greatly to the intertextual nature of the mythical form when reproduced for the child reader. While myth itself seems to be universal, as Barthes (1970b: 143) goes on to state, this is not the case, as:

the knowledge contained in a mythical concept [...] is not at all an abstract, purified essence; it is a formless, unstable, nebulous condensation, whose unity and coherence are above all due to its function [...] we can say that the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be *appropriated* (italics in the original)

The Arthurian myth has been appropriated by authors of children's fiction as a vehicle for their consciously or unconsciously assumed ideologies. Fairclough (2001: 17) argues that '[s]ociolinguistics has shown that [...] variation is not, as Saussure thought, a product of individual choice, but a process of social differentiation – language varies according to the social identities of people'. The same can then be argued of the purpose of mythical speech; it is not dependent or controlled by the will of one individual, rather it is determined by the social context at the time of construction.

1.4 Rationale and Outline

There is a wealth of Arthurian material available for scholars to explore and examine. It has been estimated by *The Arthurian Annals* that 'just over 80 per cent of all Arthurian works in English date from the twentieth century, and more than half of that number – over 4,500 – were published in the last two decades of that century' (Lacy, 2009: 121). While this encompasses texts for both adult and child readers, the sheer scope of literature available makes for some obvious problems when conducting research of this nature. While there may be other texts which do not align themselves with those under discussion, and offer an alternative view of gender and nation to those found as a result of this research, an effort has been made to select texts which represent a range of material forms and genres, and which are marketed to male and female readers. In approaching the range of texts available in this way, it is hoped that this thesis will provide a cross-section of texts which are representative of those read by the actual child reader.

In order to begin this discussion it is appropriate and pertinent to focus on the canonical English texts. Thus, Chapter Two will discuss Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136), Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (1469) and Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King* (1855-1891) in order to provide an understanding of the ideological and intertextual workings of contemporary children's Arthuriana.

Chapter Three will explore the evolution of Arthuriana through the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and the arrival of Arthuriana on the nursery shelves. Throughout the Age of Reason Arthurian fiction was unpopular reading material for adults as:

[t]he rational thinkers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment mistrusted the conservative and, from their point of view repressive, tendencies of the old monarchies and traditional religions. To the Enlightenment, with its assumptions of rationality and progress, the European Middle Ages, encompassing roughly the fifth to the fifteenth centuries, looked like an aberration. (Wood, 2008: 3)

Despite this view the period did not completely cast out Arthurian literature, as it also saw the rise of children's literature, with books produced specifically for the child reader for the first time. While critics such as MacCullum (1894) have stated that the Arthuriad was 'relegated' to the nursery shelves, it was also saved by this process. A study of Arthurian children's literature in this period aids the understanding of the development of ideological and intertextual material. This chapter encompasses a brief overview of the direction of children's Arthuriana in the post-War period, as a precursor to understanding the contemporary landscape within the field before moving on to a close reading of four texts currently available to the child reader.

Chapters Four and Five will provide an analysis of Michael Morpurgo's *Arthur, High King of Britain* (1997) and Mary Hoffman's *Women of Camelot: Queens and Enchantress at the Court of King Arthur* (2000). These texts provide an interesting contrast with regard to the workings of ideology and intertextuality, since they are both historicist retellings, yet Morpurgo's has a surface appearance of being more regressive and conservative in its portrayal of gender and nation, whereas Hoffman's text claims a feminist ideological stance. Both authors have written prolifically and are better known for other works which have received a great deal

of both scholarly and critical attention. However, neither of the texts chosen for this research have been examined beyond the depth of a cursory acknowledgement, yet they remain texts read by children and are widely available. Consequently they provide interesting material for this exploration as they reveal the ideology children are actually being exposed to through their reading.

Chapters Six and Seven will move on to explore the fantasy genre, through Diane Wynne-Jones' *Hexwood* (1994) and the television series *Merlin* (2008-2013). Fantasy literature can usually be classified as either regressive or progressive. Consequently it will be interesting to compare these texts not only with each other, but with the historicist genre to explore the implications of genre with regard to the depiction of gender and nation within Arthuriana. Pure fantasy retellings are not as prevalent as those which conform to the historicist genre, and while all Arthurian literature owes something to the fantasy genre this study will investigate whether there is a distinct difference in tone and style between historicist and fantasy retellings. As the significance of the mythical form and the ability of writers and readers to construct meaning which subverts the transhistorical nature of Arthuriana are of relevance to this thesis, alternative genres will be compared in terms of their deployment of intertextuality and its ideological effects.

Perhaps the most problematic text within this selection is *Merlin*, being a visual not a literary text, but the reasons for its inclusion relate to its material form. Contemporary society is such that 'the text' takes on multi-media forms and is no longer made solely of paper and reserved for solitary reading. Texts have become digital and their producers and readers have embraced technology in a way which means children no longer simply read books; they play versions of them on video games, on-line, watch the film, and play the board game. Therefore, a television series may no longer be encountered as something entirely different to a book by the child consumer, especially given the tendency for such series to be published in book form after the initial broadcast.²⁰ In addition to this, when examining the psychology of myth and its propensity for holding on to the same ideological core

²⁰ For example *Merlin* has an annual, a guide to potions and spells, and a complete guide, all of which are available as books.

meaning, Barthes (1970b: 160) informs us that in the structure of signifier, signified and signification, part of the signification begins to be made up by the material medium in which the myth is encountered, stating that readers perceive 'writing as the signifier of the literary myth, that is, as a form which is already filled with meaning and which received from the concept of Literature a new signification'. Consequently if the success or otherwise of the writer and audience to step away from the traditional ideological structure of the mythical form is to be explored, then it warrants an examination of the mythical form in a different material state. As such, the inclusion of *Merlin* will enable an exploration of the potential of an alternative material form to significantly alter the child audience's response to the models of gender and nation.

Through the examination of this collection of texts, some of the elements of didacticism which remain in children's fiction will be foregrounded. Examining them in pairs of historical retellings and fantasy retellings, and male- and female-authored works, will allow for a discussion of the recent trends in the representation of national and gendered identities.

2. Geoffrey of Monmouth, Malory, and Tennyson: Women, Nation and Ideology in the English Canon.

2.1 Introduction.

Mentions of Arthur within the history of the Britons begin to appear in chronicles from around the ninth century, most notably in Nennius,¹ yet the tradition of Arthur in the twenty-first century owes little to these early references. While there is some evidence of texts in the Welsh vernacular which pre-date Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136) by perhaps a century or two (Lloyd-Morgan, 2001: 2), it is largely as a result of Geoffrey's pseudo-history that the Arthuriad exists as it does today. It has been much altered since its twelfth century origins, however, it is possible to discern many of the key features and motifs which make up not only the core of the story but also its foundations within contemporaneous ideology. This historical account of Arthur and his Knights of the Table Round was filtered through several centuries of the romance tradition before Malory combined the two traditions in what is arguably the single most influential Arthurian text, *Le Morte Darthur* (1469).

The depictions are much changed from Geoffrey's text to Malory's and yet Malory's depictions contain within them similarities not only of structure but of ideology which are not easy to overlook. What perhaps strikes the scholarly reader most about their ideological similarity is that many of the authors of contemporary children's Arthuriana state an allegiance to Malory's seminal text, and yet the ideology contained in much of contemporary children's literature reflects a similarity not to the texts of the medieval era, but to the more recent *Idylls of the King* (Tennyson, 1885). This is problematic for several reasons, not least of which is the interrelationship which Tennyson shows between national stability and

¹ In the *Historia Brittonum* c. 830, Nennius is attributed as the first person to name Arthur as a Briton and warrior during the Anglo-Saxon invasion. It is worth noting that Nennius himself is a fictional construct, and the text is by an unknown author or authors.

gendered behaviour, particularly with regard to his depiction of women, which owes much to the Victorian fears over the rise of the Women's Movement.

If the representations of gender and nation as they appear in current children's literature are to be understood, it is important to understand how they have been developed to this point. To this end, this exploration into Arthur in the English tradition will begin with a discussion of these canonical texts, without which the legends and myths of King Arthur would not have survived into the modern age, beginning with the text which began it all: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*.

2.2 Geoffrey of Monmouth

Geoffrey of Monmouth published three prose Arthurian texts: *Prophetiae Merlini* (c.1130), *Historia Regum Brittanie* (c.1135), and *Vita Merlini* (c.1150). The *Historia* is often regarded as the most influential of Geoffrey's texts, with Jankulak (2010: 1) describing the narrative as 'the embryo of our familiar narrative of King Arthur' and it certainly enjoyed a significant popularity within his own lifetime.² While the other two works have had less overt influence on the development of the Arthurian story, they contain elements which are of interest to this examination of the development of ideology within the English tradition, particularly with reference to the gendered representations that have become so synonymous with the myth.

Many scholars have discussed the works of Geoffrey, with particular attention being paid to the Arthurian section of the *Historia*. The most notable of these is Stephen Knight (1983) in his influential monograph, *Arthurian Literature and Romance*, which has a depth and breadth to its study of Geoffrey's narrative which makes it useful to anyone studying Geoffrey's texts. Knight's work is particularly useful when exploring the historical context of Geoffrey's narratives, although it is, in some respects, limited in its scope. His view of the contemporaneous response to Geoffrey's text is limited, as is his view of Geoffrey's work within a multi-national discourse. For this reason the work of Parry and Calwell (1959), whose focus on

² Stephen Knight (1983: 40) cites the number of manuscripts which survive to this day as evidence of the scale of the text's influence and popularity: over fifty manuscripts from the twelfth century still exist.

the contemporaneous response to Geoffrey's text is used to provide an insight into the *Historia's* place within twelfth-century discourse. In exploring gender within this discourse, Knight argues that Geoffrey is anti-feminist and as such this discussion also incorporates the work of Tolhurst (2012) and Pèrez (2014), each of whom examine the female oriented and potential proto-feminist origins of Geoffrey's work. It is the supposition of this work that the construction of nation is the primary concern of Geoffrey, and that gender is a secondary concern, and consequently the work of both, Faletra (2014) and Jankulak (2010) are incorporated to explore the view of English or Norman superiority, and each takes a quite polemic view, and situate Geoffrey at quite different places within the discourse of nation. As such their work aids a discussion of one of the core ideologies of Arthuriana, and may help to explain the popularity of a British hero in Anglo-Norman culture.

Why would a Norman ruling class be interested in a text whose overt purpose was to 'provide the Britons, who Geoffrey found without a history, one that was not seriously challenged for four centuries' (Parry and Caldwell, 1959: 74)? The answer to this can be understood by an examination of Geoffrey's own political sympathies, and the dedications to his texts begin to suggest that in providing a history to the Britons he is in fact bolstering claims by the English monarchy that they are capable of ruling without the oversight of the French throne.

Henry I (1100-1135) found himself in the position of only having one surviving legitimate heir, his daughter Matilda.³ Faced with leaving no male heir to the English throne, Henry urged his nobles to accept Matilda as his successor, and named her as such shortly after his son, William's, death. Matilda was quickly married to Geoffrey of Anjou in order to reassure doubters of the female successors ability to rule, and this, according to Parry and Caldwell (1959: 86), explains 'the picture of good and highly capable queens [which] were probably written to prepare the way for rule by Matilda'. Matilda never achieved the throne of England as by the time of Henry's death there had been unrest between Matilda and Geoffrey of

³ This followed the drowning of his appointed successor and only legitimate male heir, William Adelin, in the White Ship disaster of 1120.

Anjou, and Henry I, allowing Stephen of Blois, Henry's nephew, to take the throne. This makes for an interesting development with regard to the dedications to the *Historia*. Geoffrey explicitly dedicates his book to supporters of King Stephen, making increasingly overt connections until he eventually dedicated the book to King Stephen himself. Consequently it is difficult to reconcile the narrative and dedications with a writer who, on a superficial level, bolsters the Norman right to invade and rule in England.

The *Historia* was both written, and intended to be read, as a true account of a peoples who Geoffrey felt to be without a history. While Parry and Caldwell (1959: 75) state that he invented a history which was accepted as a true account for four hundred years this is not an entirely accurate account. Contemporaneous evidence suggests that there were many critics of Geoffrey's work almost from the moment of its publication. For example, William of Newburgh (c.1190) emphatically refuted any claims that the work was history by stating 'that everything this man wrote about Arthur [...] was made up, partly by himself and partly by others, either from an inordinate love of lying, or for the sake of pleasing the Britons' (Thorpe, 1966: 17). If, as such contemporaneous accounts suggest, it was not taken as a history until slightly later than Geoffrey's own age,⁴ it was appreciated as a work of fiction. Owing to social stratification during the twelfth century, this was a literature for the educated elite and the popularity of the tales is evidenced by surviving manuscripts, and by the speed by which it was translated into French.

By circa 1140 Gaimar had translated it from its Latinate original form into the Norman French, followed by Wace's translation in approximately 1155. Layamon then translated Wace's Anglo-Norman text into Middle English in circa 1190. While these texts would still only have been available to a relatively select few, these translations suggest a widening of its appeal. If the underlying motivation for reading, writing, and reciting the *Historia* did not then arise from the pleasing of the Britons as Newburgh suggested, then the appeal of the text may have arisen

⁴ It is interesting to note that other fictitious characters from the *Historia* were rapidly included in the annals and genealogies of the twelfth century. Owing to the abundance of knowledge already in place of events during the supposed reign of Arthur he was omitted from these records, until such time as he became a useful figure to claim lineage from, in order to bolster a monarch's claim to the English throne.

because it spoke to contemporaneous fears and the aspirations implicit in the text's ideology.⁵ Knight (1983: 38) argues that '[s]ocial ideology is clear [...] in the written versions of the legend which were created in the twelfth century, starting with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*'. He continues, suggesting that the underlying ideology of this literature had the 'power both to realise and also assuage the disturbing forces operating in society' (*ibid*: 44). Geoffrey's dominant ideology arises from his construction of nation, and an exploration of this goes some way to answering the question of why he chose to foreground so prominently a hero of the Britons within a text written during the rule of the Normans.⁶ There are hints within the text which suggest that an argument can be posited that he was working within a dominant paradigm which aligned the desires of the English monarchs with those of the Norman French ruling classes. This position does not come through the Arthurian section though, and as this is the thematic centre of his work, it suggests that this was not his primary ideological motivation.⁷ The peripheral nature of these allusions suggests that it is necessary to look in other places within the text to account for the popularity not only of this history, but of Arthur.

The Arthurian elements within the *Historia* not only dominate in terms of the amount of text, but also with regard to the theme. The centrality and importance of Arthur cannot be overlooked, and, as Knight (1983: 51) argues, Geoffrey's 'Arthur sequence is thematically as well as structurally the climax and centre of the *Historia*, being both the most dramatic and the most specific expression of the fears and hopes of the contemporary authorities'. It is here then that the political ideology previously referred to is most apparent, as it is from these sections that it emanates, permeating the rest of the text. Given Geoffrey's loyalty to the English monarch it would seem that a logical connection can be made between the desires of the Norman French ruler and the ideology of the *Historia*. The exploration of nation

⁵ It is likely that the Middle English translation would have been part of an oral tradition, possibly to the accompaniment of an instrument.

⁶ The *Historia* is comprised of the tales of several kings, but a quarter of the narrative is given over to the story of Arthur, and approximately another quarter explicitly given over to the events which lead up to his reign, including the prophecies of Merlin.

⁷ The section where this is explicit appears in 'The Saxon Domination' with both King Gormund and King Cadwallar suggesting that the Britons had surrendered their right to rule their own lands (p.265 and p.281).

within the text comes not from the concept of nation in terms of a collective but from the idea of the nation state and national sovereignty, and it seems more likely that, rather than being a legitimization of the Norman invasion, the *Historia* can instead be argued to express a desire to ‘help the English kings in their effort to assert their independence of the kings of France’ (Parry and Caldwell, 1959: 86). It should be noted that the desires of the kings of England differed from the dominant Norman-French paradigm. There is one particular episode in the *Historia* which supports a reading of the text as one designed to bolster the desire of the English monarchs to obtain autonomous rule, Arthur’s siege of Paris, which Knight (1983: 52) argues epitomises ‘Norman expansionist vigour’.

The significance of Arthur’s invasion of Gaul and the subsequent siege of Paris (223-225) rests not only on the conquest itself, but on the place that is conquered. Arthur invades and slays Frolo, and ‘[o]nce Arthur had subjected all the regions of Gaul to his power, he returned once more to Paris and held court there’ (225). In so doing, Arthur occupies the throne of France long before anyone of French descent has held the throne of England. This action delegitimizes the claims of the French monarchy that the English King is his vassal. This stance is reinforced by Arthur’s actions to secure his French holdings.

In a passage which may have been intended to please both Henry I and Stephen, who each in their reign had battles with Anjou and Normandy resulting from family feuding, Geoffrey has Arthur give ‘Neustria, now called Normandy, to his Cup-bearer Bedevere, and the province of Anjou to his Seneschal Kay’ (225). This action carries within it the inherent suggestion that both Normandy and Anjou should be under the control of the English king, thus legitimising the English monarchs desire to rule Normandy and England without French interference. This interference and the difficult relationship between the two monarchies can be interpreted in terms of a political castration anxiety, something which can be read more explicitly into Arthur’s exploits on Mont St. Michel. Before discussing this in more depth, it is worth noting that while the use of psychoanalytic theory to analyse a text from any time which precedes Freud’s work is problematic, it can be useful to aid understanding of one of the primary focuses of Arthurian literature. In later literature concepts of nation remain bound to the early ideology of the patriarchal

government, but as the literature evolves to reflect the ever changing ideologies of the societies which give rise to the texts, the castrating threat is perceived to come from women, creating more polarised masculine and feminine realms and presenting an alternative ideological relationship between gender and nation to that found in the *Historia*. In Geoffrey's text the castration complex arises from a desire to appease Henry I and exorcise a particularly humiliating event from his past, an event which, in its bowdlerised state, has caught the imagination of generations of child readers.

It is the aim of this chapter to examine more closely Geoffrey's influence on, and appeal to, authors of children's literature. Michael Faletra (2008: 34) argues that this arises from the desire to locate the 'historical' King Arthur in 'an attempt to avoid the romantic post-Malory tradition and narrate a plausibly realistic Arthurian story'. While this may be true of authors of adult literature it is contentious in terms of the child reader. A 'plausibly realistic' Arthurian story would surely need to omit some of the most beloved moments of the narrative as it comes down to us today, not least of these the magical and supernatural elements, Merlin and Morgan, and the tales of dragons and giants. These are the stuff of children's literature, and stories which omit them entirely are rare indeed. It is arguable that Faletra's position stems from the knowledge that it was in the Age of Reason, a period in which Arthurian material became sanitised, that Geoffrey's version of the tale came back to prominence, not in its original form, but through retellings. A period known for its rejection of the typical Arthurian tropes of magic, it is perhaps surprising that its regeneration came in part through the tales of giants, extrapolated from Geoffrey, which made their way on to the nursery shelves in this period. These stories relate to one particular episode in the *Historia*; the giant slaying on Mont St. Michel.

On the death of William I, the division of his lands resulted in his youngest son being left monetary wealth but no property. Henry used his inheritance to purchase the Contentin Peninsula in 1088, from his eldest brother, Robert, Duke of Normandy.⁸ Robert subsequently ceded the sold lands to Rufus and agreed to help

⁸ Sometimes known as the Cherbourg Peninsula, this Contentin Peninsula occupies a region of Normandy, extending up to the East coast of Jersey.

him seize the sold land back from Henry (Knight, 1983: 58). Henry was forced to retreat to Mont St. Michel 'but was eventually forced to march out in humiliation' (*ibid*: 58).⁹ The result of this humiliation was not only the loss of pride, but also the loss of both his land and money, and Henry found himself reduced to a penniless state. Under such circumstances it is little wonder that, even when he persuaded the English to accept him as a more appealing option as monarch than Robert, when combined with the fractious relationship he continued to experience with Anjou and Normandy, and the lack of autonomous rule, Henry felt like the insignificant smaller brother, something which Geoffrey attempts to alleviate through Arthur's battle with the giant on Mont St. Michel.

Geoffrey describes Arthur's bravery in the face of the giant, stating '[b]eing a man of such outstanding courage, he had no need to lead the whole army against monsters of this sort' (238), which, with the implied connection between Arthur's heroics and those of the king, raise up Henry I, making him appear a successful David against Goliath, and belittling the capabilities of the giant, whom Knight (1983: 58-9) describes as 'a rapist, [who] carries a huge club and inhabits a sky-scraping peak. He is a model of phallic aggression and male dominance, perceived through the eyes of a smaller man'. This echoes the ideology of the briefly mentioned battle against Retho on Mount Arvarius (240), who the reader is informed stole the beards of kings in order to create a mantle for himself, which he wore as a symbol of his dominance over all the kings who had previously submitted to him. Despite his enormous strength, Arthur 'had met nobody stronger than Retho', yet Arthur was 'soon victorious' (240).

Faletra (2014: 16) argues that the *Historia* is 'one of the most popular and influential books of the European Middle Ages, [and] almost single-handedly establishes the template with which Anglo-Norman and later English writers imagined and manipulated the relationship between England and its Welsh periphery' which consequently creates a political myth which 'justifies the Normans and denigrates

⁹ This episode is also loosely related to an episode in the Welsh *Culwhch ac Olwen*, in which Cei defeats a giant on Mont St. Michel. While it is not possible to determine whether Geoffrey was aware of this tale, or one related to it, it seems probable that he had a knowledge of the Welsh Arthurian tradition which predates his work.

the Welsh'. He argues that the episode with Retho epitomises this as it demonstrates the domination of a Welsh king, associated with Avarius, otherwise known as Snowdon, to the greater might of an English monarch. However, this seems to be a simplification of the message of the entire passage, overlooking the origins of the giant tales, which stem from earlier Welsh texts in which Arthur is also English, and refuting the translation of Geoffrey's text into Welsh shortly after its initial publication. Jankulak (2010: 76) also argues against Faletra's position with the supposition that Geoffrey must be read as part of the Welsh tradition and as a Welsh writer, and that it is only in subsequent texts that 'Arthur was increasingly "anglicized" and historicized'.

The tale of Retho and the episode on Mont St. Michel has since been adapted in reworkings to show Arthur as victorious because he had no beard to give, and thus the humiliation becomes that of Retho, reversing the fortunes and making the threatened man the castrator of a more dominant masculine power. In constructing the castration complex in this way, Geoffrey establishes a clearly defined sense of nation, and a construction of all who are not of that nation as a threat to its stability, autonomy, and continuance. This delineation is one which is encountered in many of the following texts in this thesis, but the danger to the stability of that nation stems not from rival factions or other nations which symbolize patriarchal power, but from women.

The disruption to the nation in many of the subsequent texts stems from the location of women in the liminal space, a space where they are on the threshold of the dominant paradigm and thus able to forge a new identity which threatens that paradigm.¹⁰ It is noteworthy that in this instance Henry, and therefore Arthur and the England they signify, occupy this space of liminality. The liminal is not a place of threat, as it will later become, but a spatial and temporal opportunity to forge a new and stronger national identity.¹¹ It is notable that the feminine threat is absent in Geoffrey's text, but not only do they not occupy spaces of liminality or threat,

¹⁰ The concept of the liminal space as a site of alternative power sources will be explored throughout the thesis, but for the most in depth discussion, see Chapter Six.

¹¹ It is interesting to note that this concept of the liminal as a space of rebirth is continued by subsequent writers, although primarily in association with feminine spaces.

they do not occupy any space within the narrative, being largely absent. Guinevere is mentioned rarely; Morgan La Fey gets a fleeting mention.¹² Thorpe (1966: 27) argues that 'Geoffrey's young women do not live for us, least of all Guinevere', and while this is largely true, the scant mentions the reader does get suggest a different power structure from that which later texts present, while containing within them the seeds of the story that is arguably the best known facet of the tales of King Arthur; that of Guinevere's adultery.

The depiction of Guinevere is complex. In one respect, she is a silent and barely acknowledged presence; in another, she represents a model of a good queen in order to prepare the way for Matilda once she was named as Henry I's successor. Both these portrayals have some validity. In the section which relates the details of Arthur's marriage, Guinevere is mentioned only in passing, when Geoffrey informs his reader that Arthur 'himself had married a woman called Guinevere [...] She was the most beautiful woman in the entire island' (221). This mention imparts more information than a cursory glance suggests. It establishes the need for the female, the object of the male gaze, to be beautiful, reflecting not only her outward appearance but an internal goodness which makes her an acceptable love object for the male hero.¹³ However, Tolhurst, (2010: 15-16) argues that Geoffrey's text can be read in proto-feminist terms:

Geoffrey's version of the Arthurian legend deserves more attention from both scholarly and popular audiences than it currently receives because its King Arthur inhabits a fictionalized medieval world in which female figures are valued, have their share of political power, and not only receive significant narratorial sympathy but also offer models of heroism that complement - and at times surpass - the models that their male counterparts embody.

The difficulty with such a reading is that the objectification of women begins in Geoffrey's text with scant references, such as the one alluded to above, becoming elaborated on and corrupted by the ideologies of subsequent authors. Furthermore, evidence can be found in the *Historia* of the seeds which will develop into a familiar

¹² In the *Vita Merlini*.

¹³ The discussion the male gaze is continued on pp.48: 86: 117-120: 123-4: 136: 165: 167.

degradation of women within the Arthurian myth in Geoffrey's account of Mordred's usurpation.

In retellings since at least the late medieval period, Mordred has been left in charge of both the kingdom and of Guinevere, reducing Guinevere to both an infantile state and making her little more than chattel. Geoffrey's account differs from these later tales, in so far as he states that Arthur 'handed over the task of defending Britain to his nephew Mordred *and* to his Queen Guinevere' (237, my italics). This represents a fundamental shift in thinking regarding the capacity of women to rule.¹⁴

The alteration in social structure during the Norman rule resulted in a significant loss of status for women, and thus it is surprising to find Geoffrey presenting an alternative view of the capabilities of women. Consequently, while Guinevere is largely absent from the narrative, the idea of her being left in charge of a kingdom with Mordred might suggest a proto-feminist stance towards women, and an attempt to reassert some of their lost status. There is only the briefest of allusions which supports the supposition that Geoffrey presented good queens in order to support King Henry I's decision to appoint Matilda as his successor. What these allusions reflect more clearly is the notion that alternative patriarchal power bases pose a threat to the kingdom, and not the subversive feminine power which becomes more apparent in later texts. The overwhelming concern of the era was not that of female leadership and the possible folly of this, but of civil war, and discord amongst the ruling classes.

While it is difficult to say from this distance whether Geoffrey intended to promote a view of women as visible leaders, what can be stated is that this allusion was not continued by later writers.¹⁵ What is perpetuated is an even vaguer reference to Guinevere's infidelity, when Geoffrey reports 'this treacherous tyrant [Mordred] was living adulterously and out of wedlock with Queen Guinevere, who had broken the vows of her earlier marriage. About this particular matter, most noble Duke,

¹⁴ During the Anglo-Saxon era, women had enjoyed the right to own land and to will it to whom they chose. With the arrival of Anglo-Norman rule these rights were eroded, and along with them the notion of Queen-ship. See Leyser (1995: 74).

¹⁵ Some texts of the late 20th and early 21st century attempt to show women in a positive light, but as we shall see later, the success of these is often as doubtful as Geoffrey's intentions.

Geoffrey of Monmouth prefers to say nothing' (257). This hint of adultery in Guinevere's past is loaded with the suggestion that she has chosen to desert the usurped king, and her status as joint guardian of Britain in his absence can lead the reader to conclude that she was complicit in Mordred's actions. This interpretation makes the supposition of Geoffrey's proto-feminism dubious, but neither reading is unproblematic. As Jankulak (2010: 72) argues:

Geoffrey's narrative makes little of Guinevere's adultery and much of Mordred's usurpation of the crown: Geoffrey was interested in the political significance of the event (one whose contemporary relevance, however, remains unclear) and had little time for the personal dimension that would come to mean so much to romance writers in the French tradition.

This would suggest that Geoffrey's political motivation for writing had little to do with the significance of a female monarch, and much to do with the fear of other patriarchal powers. Jankulak always argues that the contemporaneous relevance of this episode is unclear, however given that Anglo-Saxon heiresses were frequently married to Anglo-Norman gentry, being seen as both 'peace-weavers and as channels of inheritance' (Searle, cited in Leyser, 1995: 74) it is interesting that Geoffrey chooses to suggest initially that such a union might take place and then revokes this, telling the reader that when Arthur's forces failed to defeat Mordred's army that Guinevere 'gave way to despair. She fled from York to the city of Legions and there [...] she took her vows among the nuns, promising to lead a chaste life' (259). It is difficult to read Guinevere's despair as a response to anything but Mordred's continued defiance against the king, coming as it does immediately after the news that 'the Perjurer re-formed his army' (259), and this is supported by the fact that many aristocratic women joined convents following the Norman invasion as 'an eleventh century form of evacuation' (Leyser, 1995: 72). However, the vow to lead a chaste life suggests that she had been unchaste, and that the adultery which so characterises later retellings is present in Geoffrey's text, albeit in a subtler form. The explication of Guinevere's character as she appears in the *Historia* reveals a process of denigration between her twelfth century origins in the English tradition

and her current status. This is even more apparent when the fleeting reference to Morgen in the *Vita Merlini* is examined.¹⁶

Morgen has her origins in earlier Welsh Triads (Bromwich, 1959: 49), where she appears as a daughter of Avallach, ruler of Avalon. As Loomis (1959: 65-66) explains:

[i]n Medieval Britain two interpretations of the name were current. There were those, including Geoffrey of Monmouth, who connected the word with *aval*, meaning 'apple' [...] On the other hand, there was the alternative explanation that Avalloc or Avollo was a ruler of the island who dwelt there with his daughters, including Morgan.

In Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*, Avalon appears as 'the Fortunate Isle' which 'produces all things of itself' (26). It is here that Morgen resides with her nine sisters, of whom she is the most skilled 'in the healing art, and excels her sisters in the beauty of her person' (27). Her origins, far from being the malevolent presence she would later become,¹⁷ are those of a goddess. Early magic was gendered, with the power of women lying in the healing art (Breuer, 2009: 10), whereas men held the power of prophecy and transformative magic. Even in her goddess state, there are hints of Morgen's subversive power, holding as she does the ability to 'change her shape' (27). This is compounded by her association with the isle of apples, and the Edenic imagery of Avalon. Such echoes of the fall and the arrival of original sin tie Morgen not to the positive power of the Virgin, but to the dangerous influence of Eve. While Geoffrey himself makes no overt reference to this, it is apparent that, as with Guinevere, the seeds of the denigration of her character which follow are already present.

The denigration of Morgan's character is perhaps less surprising than that of Guinevere's. She occupies a space beyond the bounds of patriarchal control, as the ruler of her own liminal nation. Pérez (2014: 5-6) argues that the denigration of Morgan's character, whose 'sexuality becomes increasingly comical and grotesque' (*ibid*: 6) has its origins in the Irish precursors of Morgan, Morrígan and Badbh, War

¹⁶ Morgan La Fey appears as Morgen in the *Vita Merlini*, and alternately as Morgan, Morgain, and Morgana in later versions.

¹⁷ By the 14th century she has become a threat to Camelot, as seen in the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

goddesses of whom a glimpse ‘on the way to war means certain death’ (*ibid*: 5). She argues that Geoffrey’s action foreshadows Morgan’s role as the purveyor of Arthur to Avalon, however, as Avalon is the sight of Arthur’s restoration, not his death, this connection is not as apparent as Pérez asserts. In their Celtic incarnation, Morgan’s predecessors have the same association with maternity, creation, sexuality and water that Morgan possesses in the early Arthurian literature and while within this position she wields a great deal of power. As a result she is directly related to the ‘Mother Goddess Danu/Anu [which] serves to reinforce Morgan’s function as a Sovereignty Goddess in the Arthurian tradition’ (*ibid*: 7).¹⁸ While the notion of the Sovereignty Goddess within Arthurian literature appears to be an addition which has arisen since Bradley’s feminist revision and thus needs interrogating, it still remains evident that Morgan is situated in both the courtly masculine realm and the natural feminine realm. This straddling of two worlds, the divine and the earthly, which is symbolised in Arthurian literature by Morgan’s occupancy of both courtly life and her dominion over Avalon, is the root of her liminality, and thus her uncontrollable nature. While the liminal can be used within Arthuriana for a positive image of femininity and rebirth,¹⁹ it has more usually become associated with a threat to national stability, thus intertwining the ideologies of gender and nation.

The intersecting ideologies of gender and nation in Geoffrey’s narrative find their place in a distinctly medieval setting, reflecting the fears and concerns of the age in which he wrote and thus bearing no resemblance to the Celtic origins of the legend. Such a setting reinforces the purpose of Geoffrey’s text and not only was Arthur the vehicle for Geoffrey’s ideology, it created a legacy which influenced, to some extent, every retelling which followed. As Knight (1983: 39) argues, the influence of Geoffrey’s text ‘in an abbreviated and ideologically reshaped version, has come down in English through the work of Thomas Malory’. It is to Malory then that we now turn, and to an exploration of arguably the most influential Arthurian text ever written.

¹⁸ From *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, the earliest recorded Irish origin myth, in which Mother Goddess Danu/Anu is the creator.

¹⁹ See Chapter Six.

2.3 Sir Thomas Malory and *Le Morte Darthur*

As mentioned above, shortly after Geoffrey wrote the *Historia* it was translated into French, reaching a wider audience than was made possible by its original Latin. This highlights not only its popularity at the time of writing, but a new direction for the Arthurian myth. It was transformed from Geoffrey's pseudo-historic text into a tale of romance and chivalry, becoming part of the French romance tradition. Many writers of this period made their own additions to the tales, introducing familiar motifs, such as the love triangle, the dangerous Morgan La Fey, and the sword embedded in the anvil, more typically referred to as the sword in the stone. The result of this was a diverse range of material that often bore little relation to a cohesive whole. To some extent this dispersion is still in evidence, but it was much reduced when Sir Thomas Malory wrote his *Le Morte Darthur* (1469). As Morris (1982: 6) explains:

the very fertility of the romancers' invention was their undoing. Indeed, the whole legend might well have perished if Malory had not cut away so much of the dead wood, and it is to Malory more than to any other writer that we owe the survival of the legend over the succeeding centuries.

Combining the French romance tradition and the English historical tradition, Malory produced the first semi-cohesive whole from the diverse legends and myths of King Arthur and his Knights.

As may be expected, a significant number of academics have written on Malory's seminal text, indeed far too many to mention them all within this exploration of the depiction of nation and gender within *Le Morte Darthur*. Consequently this discussion draws on scholars whose work is most relevant to the ideologies which are the focus of this thesis. The most prominent of these is McCarthy (1988) whose text, *An Introduction to Malory*, provides, as the title suggests, a good overview of the diverse interpretations of Malory's text. It is an invaluable resource to researchers, as it provides a solid foundation for further reading and interpretation. Knight's (1983) text is again useful, as he explores Malory's depiction of women and his place within the romance tradition, and the way in which he combines this with the English historicist tradition. Windeatt (2009) has been influential in the continuance of this view, and the way in which this affects the perception of

Lancelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship and Edwards (1996) continues this discussion of the place of women within Malory and their comparative silence as Malory turns away from the romance tradition and focuses on the political and public landscape which offers little opportunity for the female voice to be heard.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of this work, as many subsequent authors of Arthuriana claim Malory's work as their primary inter-text. Stephens and McCallum (1998:128) argue that 'the pattern for retellings [...] derives ultimately from Malory'. In making assertions regarding the primary inter-text, authors allude to a similar weight of authority, history, and a comparable ideology. The depictions of gender and nation are not their own, but are generally based on those found in the late medieval period, and consequently an understanding of the ideology in Malory's text in regard to these two key areas is essential if an understanding of the workings of ideology and intertextuality in contemporary retellings for children and young adults is to be attained. As Norris Lacy (2009: 123) argues:

[m]ost readers first become acquainted with Arthurian legend through Malory's version as retold by modern authors, usually for younger readers and thus often simplified or bowdlerised. In general the Arthur presented in these retellings is an idealised figure, a noble and nearly flawless ruler betrayed by Mordred, who is generally presented as Arthur's nephew.

Along with this idealised image of Arthur, an element that would be hugely influential with regards to Tennyson's own *Arthuriad*, Malory, like all authors of Arthurian texts, wrote of and for his time.

While Malory has, to a greater or lesser extent,²⁰ been viewed as timeless, his *Morte Darthur* has as much ideology reflecting the socio-economic context of his own day as any other text. As it has been argued that ideology is inherent to all writing, it is impossible to separate a text from the context in which it was written. Malory wrote from the stance of a nation torn apart by civil disruption, amidst the War of the Roses, and it is perhaps no wonder then that his *Arthuriad* is aimed at the promotion of national unity, foregrounding as it does the dissolution of Camelot. As McCarthy (1988: 170) attests 'Malory sees the story of Arthur as the history of a nation not of a man'. In scope it goes beyond that of the narrative of a single life, and in so doing

²⁰ The extent of Malory's influence will form much of the following discussion on intertextuality.

Malory makes Arthur synonymous with Britain, and consequently any threat to Arthur constitutes a threat to the nation. When Geoffrey penned the *Historia*, England was attempting to assert its right to autonomous rule, free from French interference. When Malory wrote *Le Morte Darthur* the England he inhabited was one at the point of civil war, as the rival claimants to the throne, the Yorkists and the Lancastrians, wrestled land, property, and rights from each other.²¹ It is against this backdrop, while a 'knyght presoner' (112) that Malory created what is arguably the greatest Arthurian work ever written.²²

It is also worth noting that both the Yorkists and the Lancastrians attested that they were direct descendants of the legendary King Arthur, who until the mid-fourteenth century had been widely regarded as an invention of Geoffrey's. While others attest that Geoffrey's history was not challenged for nearly four centuries, this was, in fact, not the case.²³ While it was always significant that Arthur was a Briton, by the late fifteenth century Arthur's 'Britishness' was of paramount importance and King Arthur had become synonymous with Britain. Windeatt (2009: 86) explains that in:

[a]bridging and simplifying his French model, Malory [introduces] his cast of characters in a designedly hurried sequence of episodes, navigating an objective course through incidents heavy with implication, in the shifting negotiation between history and historicized romance that will characterize *Morte Darthur*.

It is this weight of historical allusion which lends the text its ideological impetus, as Malory seeks to define the history of a nation through the history of a man, and as such offer a warning to his contemporaneous audience. Arthur was always seen as a great and powerful warrior, and was depicted as being touched by the gods, as evidenced by his miraculous birth and rumoured second coming, and as such must be portrayed as infallible. There is only one thing which can bring down such a mighty man, and that is his betrayal. Betrayal of the king becomes betrayal of the

²¹ Malory himself fought for both the Yorkists and the Lancastrians, changing sides sometime between 1460 and 1468.

²² 'Knight Prisoner'.

²³ See p.30. When the throne became contested as a result of the usurpation of Richard II, it began to be important to each side to legitimise their claim to the throne. From claims to be in possession of the true Round Table, to children being named after Arthur, to the exhumation of Arthur's 'grave' at Glastonbury, an acknowledged figure of myth became one of history, fortified by his inclusion in royal genealogies.

country, an unpatriotic act, and it is significant that this act is not attributed to Lancelot and Guinevere.

What may be surprising to readers aware only of the retro-sexist nature of later retellings is the way in which Malory utilises the adultery of Guinevere and Lancelot not to represent women as treacherous and deceptive, but to illustrate the essential role of the triangle in reinforcing homosocial bonds which maintain the stability of the kingdom, and in so doing ties gendered behaviour and national stability together in an explicit manner which will become corrupted in later texts. The role of Guinevere as a stabilising force within Camelot comes as soon as Guinevere arrives as Arthur's queen. She does not stabilise the nation through her own person, but through the dowry which she brings with her in the form of the Round Table. This confers on Arthur a legitimacy, a right to rule, which he has been lacking up to this point, amid continued unrest over his parentage and succession as:

[i]n the begynnyng of Arthure, aftir he was chosyn Kynge by adventure and by grace – for the moste party of the barowns knew nat he was Uther Pendragon son but as Merlyon made hit openly knowyn, but yet many grete kyngis and lordis hylde hym grete were for that cause (62).²⁴

The necessity for this union in order to stifle the unrest surrounding Arthur's kingship has been overshadowed in subsequent retellings by the warning which Merlin gives to Arthur when he chooses Guinevere for his bride; '[b]ut Marlyon warned the Kyng covertly the Gwenyver was nat holsom for hym to take to wyff, for he warned hym that Launcelot scholde love hir, and sche hym agayne' (62).²⁵ This reference is so fleeting in Malory's text that it almost takes the form of an aside. It is also preceded by Arthur's utterance of Guinevere's importance to the stability of the nation, which mitigates much of the effect of Merlin's warning, as the fact that her father is 'the whyche holdyth in his the Table Rounde that ye tolde

²⁴ Trans: 'In the beginning of Arthur's rule, after he had been chosen king by his adventures and his grace/noble nature, the majority of the barons did not know that he was the son of Uther Pendragon unless Merlin had told them. So a great many kings and lords made ware against him. This was war made as they did not think Arthur the rightful heir of Uther Pendragon'.

²⁵ Trans: 'But Merlin warned the king in secret that Guinevere was not wholesome enough for him to marry, and he warned him that Lancelot would love Guinevere, and she would return his love'.

me he had hit of my fadir Uther' (62).²⁶ Malory further distances the reader from the severity of this warning, as prior to this Merlin prophesises that 'Mordred hys owne sonne sholde be agaynste hym' (52) in the last great battle, foregrounding, as Geoffrey had done, the danger of warring factions within the patriarchal hierarchy over the portrayal of danger from subversive women.²⁷ Yet it was that fleeting warning of Guinevere's unwholesomeness which caught the imagination of authors, leading to an inextricable link between Guinevere's actions and the fall of Camelot. This connection is largely absent in Malory though, as he rather foregrounds a different aspect of the adultery.

Edwards (1996: 43) hypothesises that:

the queens in their castles are associated with the forms of courtly love, marriage, culture, the social order [...] They are also so strongly associated with adultery that I will argue that adultery is the central or sustaining contradiction of the Arthurian chivalric world.

Indeed, *Morte Darthur* is littered with adulterous love, nearly all of which is eventually disastrous, but it transpires that it is not adulterous love in and of itself which is the destructive force. While such love remains comparatively private, at least to the extent whereby the cuckolded husband is not forced to openly acknowledge the betrayal, such bonds prove to be a stabilising force. As Edwards (*ibid*: 45) goes on to state:

Guinevere's role is not to uphold the court, but to uphold the 'homosocial' bonds between men who uphold the court [...] In the triangles of male homosocial desire, the woman is the focus which enables the men who desire her to bond, to make social contracts, and, importantly, to enact their rivalries.

As such, it is possible to read the love between Guinevere and Lancelot not as a destructive force, but one with tangible, positive benefits, allowing as it does a strengthening of the bond between the king and his most able knight.

While Malory provides an initial introduction to Guinevere which states that she is not wholesome for the king to wed, this overt reference to the betrayal and devastation of the adultery is somewhat lost in a lengthy narrative which generally

²⁶ Trans: 'The man who has possession of the round table, and you told me he had it from my father, Uther'.

²⁷ Trans: 'Mordred, his own son, would fight against him'.

allows for the adulterous couples to function as part of the accepted social order. Homosocial bonds are seen as necessary to cement the fraternal bonds which hold the kingdom together, and it is evident that the relationship between the knights and the king alters only as their relationship to the significant women of the narrative change. Indeed, rather than condemning the adulterous love of Lancelot and Guinevere, Malory goes to some lengths to convince the reader that they are true and loyal lovers, while at the same time true and loyal to the king. Windeatt (2009: 99) supports this assertion, stating that Malory 'implies that Lancelot's constancy to Arthur and Guinevere as knight and lover far outweighs the sinfulness of his adulterous love, and there is no contradiction between his loyalty and love'. This contradiction is able to exist comfortably in the text because Malory is not following the romantic tradition as it had been developed by the French during the centuries between Geoffrey and Malory's texts. Rather, he has created a historicized romance, foregrounding not the personal tragedy of the love triangle, but the interplay between the personal and the public, and the need for each character within the social order to adhere to her/his role. To some extent, then, viewed through the lens of the necessity to prioritise the homosocial bonds, and the rigid feudal hierarchy which held the nation together, there is no contradiction: Loyalty to the king meant love for the queen.

Sedgwick (1985: 25) argues that homosocial bonding can function as a cultural norm by which masculinity is given precedence, in the form of 'the old boys' network'. Walsh (2001: 18) goes on to explain that homosociality 'can range from hierarchical forms [...] made manifest in bonds based on competitive mastery and subordination, to more egalitarian forms that rely on an ideology of brotherhood'. The depiction of homosociality in Malory is one based on the premise of chivalry, and thus brotherhood, and while this still has the potential to act as an exclusory form, the centrality of women to the formation and maintenance of these bonds emphasises not only the importance of the male space but also the liminal female space. The majority of the adulterous liaisons take place within the bedroom, where both Sir Trystram de Lyones and Sir Lancelot de Lac are discovered without the accoutrements of masculinity to defend themselves. This removal of masculinity within the liminal space of the bedroom, a space both physically inside the court

and psychologically beyond its boundaries, emphasises the need for the liminal and feminising space for the knights to experience restoration of the spirit, and through this process reaffirm their loyalty to the king through their love for his queen.

It is not possible to view this without seeing the inherently problematic result of the fall of Camelot, which could be seen superficially to arise from the adultery of the queen and the foremost knight of the realm. As McCarthy (1988: 44) explains:

Malory is not interested in merely punishing Lancelot and Guinevere for their sin. Its wages may well be the death of the flower of kings and knights but their contrition is shown to be at once central and incidental [...] it took a lot more than adultery to destroy the realm.

It is the incidental nature of the adultery in relation to the fall of Camelot, and the destruction of a nation, which has been overlooked in later retellings, where it has often become the central factor. Consequently, even those retellings which appear to be direct translations of Malory into an abridged format for children often take the words but lose the context. As such, in *Le Morte Darthur* the reader feels the contrition of the adulterous lovers, and understand the fractured and disparate nature of the Round Table following the pursuit of the *Sankgreal*, where Arthur proclaims ‘I am sure at this Quest of the Sankegreall shall of ye of the Rownde Table deapрте, and nevyр shall I se you agayne hole togydirs’ (501-502).²⁸ The consequence of this is that when Lancelot and Guinevere blame themselves for the death of Arthur and the fall of Camelot, as evidenced by Guinevere’s assertion that ‘[t]horow thys same man and me hath all thys warre be wrought, and the deth of the moste noblest knyghtes of the worlde’ (691-92),²⁹ the reader is unlikely to believe it because Malory has thus far defended Guinevere and Lancelot, and made the reader aware that the fall is largely the result of the machinations of Mordred.

It is Mordred whom Merlin first warns the reader of,³⁰ and it is Mordred who slays the king. But more significantly it is Mordred who ruptures the homosocial bond which exists between Lancelot and Arthur, exposing the conflict between the liminal and courtly spaces, by confronting the king with the adultery and making

²⁸ Trans: ‘I am sure that this Quest for the Holy Grail will see all my knights of the Round Table depart, and that I shall never again see you all together’.

²⁹ Trans: ‘Through this man and me has this war been caused, and the death of the most noble knight in the world’.

³⁰ See p.103 for a discussion of this.

public that which had been private (647). Edwards (1996: 48) asserts that '[i]n its hidden state, adultery sustains the lateral political ties of the fellowship; exposed, it causes a swift reversion to hierarchical feudal relations'. This ideology is a significant departure from the ideological stance of twentieth and twenty-first century retellings, with their focus on the adultery of Guinevere and Lancelot as the primary cause of the fall of Camelot. The cause of the fall lies instead with a rival claimant to the throne in the figure of the illegitimate, incestuously begotten Mordred, thus reverting to the nationalist ideology which underpins so much of Arthuriana.

Stephens and McCallum (1998: 130) attest to the pervasiveness of nationalism in post-War children's literature, stating that:

[m]ost retellings of the Arthurian story have originated in Britain, which [...] proves to be a context in which the story is constantly transformed into a parable for modern times whereby British culture is under siege from external military and cultural onslaughts [...] Thus ethics, exemplary behaviour, and nationalism become inextricably intertwined.

While they are talking about the tales as they exist some five centuries after Malory, the same underlying ideology can be argued to exist in both late medieval texts and post-War literature. Both result from a turbulent political time, and while the threat to patriarchy later becomes synonymous with the women of the tales, largely as a result of the work of Green (1953) and Tennyson in the late Victorian period, Malory, like Geoffrey before him, sees the dominant threat to the stability of the nation to be illegitimate claimants to the throne. This would suggest an absence of woman-blaming in the work of both Geoffrey and Malory. While in Tennyson's work the reader may find it hard to see Guinevere's repentance as a true act of contrition rather than as an act of self-preservation, when Malory's Guinevere states 'Sir Lancelot, I regyre the and beseche the hartily, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, that thou never see me no more in the visayge' (662),³¹ it strikes the reader that they are not as guilty as this suggests (McCarthy, 1988: 44). While McCarthy continues, suggesting that this is because of Malory's treatment of Lancelot, owing largely to the fact that Lancelot is the knight who remains fighting

³¹ Trans: 'Sir Lancelot, and require and beseech you deeply, that for all the love that was ever between us, that you will never see me again in person'.

for Arthur until the end, it is striking that one of the most vivid and living characters to the reader, and to subsequent adaptors, is that of Guinevere.

Many of the critics of Malory's work have noted that he spends little time devoted to an exploration of character, which is only of interest to his narrative when the actions of an individual impact directly on the plot. The result of this is that as Malory's narrative moves towards its inevitable conclusion:

character comes to be important [...] and Guinevere emerges as his most striking character. Guinevere is imperious, and sometimes witty [...] Her power is that absolute power of the beloved in the courtly love tradition, which is revealed as merely the power to reject; the exercise of that power labels her as capricious, cruel and arbitrary. (Edwards, 1996: 50)

While the reader is mistaken if they believe they know Guinevere, this in itself is significant because Malory's Guinevere is so well-drawn that there is the sense of a woman beyond the page. This is made more relevant as she is given some of the longest speeches of any character. Guinevere is not, as she will become in some of the later texts,³² a silent presence in the background, but rather the vibrant centre of the tales, controlling the hearts of Arthur and Lancelot, steering her own destiny, and Guinevere is fundamental to the upholding of the homosocial bonds upon which the kingdom rests. However, if the above discussion suggests an unproblematic reading of the representation of gender, and more particularly women, in *Le Morte Darthur*, then it poses the question of just how Guinevere, along with Morgan La Fey, became the primary threat and the root cause of the fall of Camelot in later retellings which claim to be Malorian.

The reality is that Malory's text is layered and nuanced, and no one picture of gender stands clearly apart. The above discussion illuminates one aspect of Guinevere's agency which suggests an emerging subjectivity (Edwards, 1996: 54) yet, as with the hero quest narrative which will come to characterise retellings, her agency is stifled by the fact that it remains bound to the will of the dominant patriarchal discourse of the time. As Knight (1983: 126) argues '[t]here are many female characters in Malory, but they do not act for themselves. They either assist or hinder the male characters in their career towards honour and self-definition'.

³² Most notably those of Tennyson and Morpurgo.

Guinevere's character and speech comes to be so prominent in the later part of the text not for herself, but for the impact this has on the males, and the reader sees her from the perspective of wife and lover, in other words from the perspective of her relationship to the men, and therefore because of her object relationship within this bond. Guinevere is important because of her function in affirming homosocial bonds, not because she is witty or vivacious.

Critics such as Edwards (1996: 40) and Riddy (1987: 58) go further than Knight, discussing not only the lack of agency that Malory's women seem to exhibit, but highlighting the difficult relationship that the author presents regarding women and sexuality. If Guinevere is not to be ultimately found guilty of the fall of Camelot, this is not only because she is a 'trew love' (651), but also because she is the object of the male gaze: the desired, not the desirous female.³³ As Riddy (1987: 58) explains, throughout *Le Morte Darthur* there is a 'painful ambivalence about women: by virtue of their sex they should be protected, but by virtue of their sexuality they deserve to die'. This ambivalence becomes transmuted in later retellings into an often overt warning regarding the perils of the sexual women, an element which Malory himself keeps largely limited to the character of Morgan La Fey.

As previously noted, in Geoffrey's brief reference to Morgan she is a water fairy, Queen of the Isle of Avalon, renowned for her beauty and healing magic. It is therefore pertinent to ask, as Breuer (2009: 2) does, '[h]ow did this woman, famous in early Arthurian tradition for her healing magic, become the vicious thorn lodged deep in Arthur's side' that she has become by the time she appears in Malory's text? While it is always difficult to apply psychoanalytic theory to a text written before Freud's seminal work, the motifs of the *Femme Castratrice*,³⁴ including Morgan's role as anti-mother to Mordred, adulteress, attempted murderer of her husband and Arthur, and her desire for the ultimate phallic symbol of power, Excalibur, are present in Malory's text. While Morgan plays what is effectively a minor part in terms of her appearance in the text, the malice of the desirous female is felt

³³ See pp. 35: 86: 117-119: 120: 123-4: 136: 165: 167 for a discussion of the male gaze.

³⁴ Morgana's later incarnation in this role, in the TV series *Merlin*, will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

throughout *Le Morte Darthur*. This might appear to be a dramatic departure from Geoffrey's work, but is in fact part of a gradual denigration of character which becomes more pronounced as the historical threat of rival political leaders diminished and the rise of the suffragist movement centred women as a greater threat to social stability, as seen in Tennyson's *Idylls*.³⁵ The patriarchal threat symbolised by giants in Geoffrey's work is gradually replaced by the giant's female counterpart, the witch, who, as Knight (1983: 116) argues, is 'that figure who protects male characters from final guilt'.

While Geoffrey of Monmouth began the great English literary tradition of Arthurian texts, many contemporary authors cite Malory as their primary inter-text. However, as this thesis begins its discussion of children's literature it will become apparent that much of the ideology that suffuses these texts comes not from the medievalised Celtic text of Geoffrey, nor from the comparatively liberal Malory, but from the much later work of Tennyson.

2.4 Tennyson

After Malory wrote *Le Morte Darthur* no major works were published on the Arthuriad until the Victorian period. It did not disappear though, and through its inclusion in chapbooks and tales designed for the edification of children it remained present within the British cultural consciousness until it emerged from the nursery shelves in the 1800s to become a classic of the British literary tradition.³⁶ While it is true that other poets of the Victorian era engaged with the Arthurian tradition, these remained isolated poems. Tennyson spent a considerable amount of his working life perfecting and honing his Arthurian work, reflecting contemporaneous concerns over the role of women, the decline of patriarchal rule, and fears over the stability of the nation in the context of a rapidly shifting social structure.³⁷

³⁵ As evidenced by texts from the 13th and 14th Centuries, including 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'.

³⁶ See Chapter Three for an exploration of this within children's Arthuriana.

³⁷ It is surmised that Tennyson knew of the Arthurian texts from childhood when it is likely that he read a contemporaneous translation by Wilkes (1816), a somewhat bowdlerised version of Malory's text (Turner, 1976: 159).

Much of the material which discusses Tennyson's Arthurian work has little new or interesting to say, generally reiterating the strongly polemical view which the preliminary title suggests. Turner (1976), Ricks (1969), Gilbert (1983) and Knight (1983) all focus their attention on the anti-feminist rhetoric which permeates the *Idylls* and combine this analysis with a view of the apparent source material and a view of the social difficulties faced by Victorian England, as interpreted by Tennyson. This is not to say that this work is not useful, and Knight in particular provides an interesting and thorough discussion of the depiction of women. Later academics provide a more interesting and diverse reading of the view of women, with Barczewski (2000) offering a reading of Elaine which posits her agency and situates her as the possessor, not the object, of the gaze. Ahern (2004) focusses on the portrayal of Guinevere and her agency, and these two interpretations provide an interesting juxtaposition with Knight's earlier work. However, these later writers ignore the view that Arthur is central to Tennyson's work, and to his ideology.

Tennyson became convinced that King Arthur was the embodiment of the ideal man,³⁸ and it has been claimed, principally by his son,³⁹ that he took his influences for his Arthurian work from a huge array of sources, including Welsh folklore, Geoffrey of Monmouth,⁴⁰ Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of *Mabinogion*, Layamon's *Brut*, and most importantly, Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Despite this extensive research, an examination of *Idylls of the King* suggests that the basis for much of the work derived from Malory, but that ultimately he 'strictly subordinated his narrative sources to his own purposes, taking what suited him, ignoring what did not, and creatively adapting any details for which he could find a use' (Turner, 1976: 156). What Tennyson's purposes were in the creation of a Victorian Arthuriad will be the subject of the discussion that follows.

Tennyson's first major publication, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) contains a fragment of 'Sire Lancelot and Queen Guinevere' and he did not stop working on Arthurian material until the final version of the *Idylls* was produced in 1891, just a

³⁸ See Hallam Tennyson's introduction to *Idylls of the King*, which can be found in Ricks, C (ed.) (1969) *The Poems of Tennyson*, London: Longman. pp.1460-1466.

³⁹ Hallam Tennyson, *ibid*.

⁴⁰ *Historia Regum Britannae*.

year before his death (Ricks, 1969: 1464). While an examination of the development of his Arthurian narrative shows that he changed the rhetoric with which he framed the tales,⁴¹ the only other significant change was that they became increasingly allegorical in nature as they took on greater political significance. As Gilbert (1983: 864) argues that while ‘the author may have altered his plans for the book [...] his emphasis on the corrosiveness of female sexuality never changed’. Knight (1983: 154) suggests that Tennyson’s ideology can be seen most clearly in the narrative framework, stating ‘[it] indicates his dissatisfaction with the idea of a merely literary and emotive use of the Arthurian legend, his growing sense that a poet should, while still mastering emotion and lyricism, be socially responsible’.

Hallam Tennyson explains that his father ‘said that the two great social questions impending in England were “the housing and education of the poor man before making him our master, and the higher education of women”’ (Gilbert, 1983: 156). This suggests that, while considering himself a liberal, Tennyson, like many men of his era, tempered this liberalism with a fear of social change and Tennyson’s work is peppered with examples of his reticence towards the shifting position of women within society. Arguably the primary function, particularly of the first set of *Idylls* (1859),⁴² is that of the established patriarch attempting to contain the threat of the suffragist movement which had been gradually gaining ground and support throughout much of Tennyson’s life. If Tennyson was already concerned about women stepping out of their socially condoned place in 1847,⁴³ the forward momentum of the Women’s Movement throughout the period in which he was writing the *Idylls* did nothing to dispel these anxieties.⁴⁴ Another significant political change that is clearly reflected in Tennyson’s *Arthuriad* is the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, the year that Tennyson first privately published the *idylls*, and the year in which he began ‘Guinevere’.

The overriding concern with these changes shapes much of the *Idylls*, but they are most prevalent in the first four to be published in 1859: ‘Merlin and Vivien’,

⁴¹ See Knight, 1983, for a discussion on Tennyson’s shifting sympathies.

⁴² The 1859 *Idylls* were published as ‘Vivien’, ‘Enid’, ‘Guinevere’ and ‘Elaine’.

⁴³ The year he published *The Princess*, his exploration of the impact of female education.

⁴⁴ This is most apparent in his exploration of the character of Vivien.

‘Lancelot and Elaine’, ‘The Marriage of Geraint’ and ‘Geraint and Enid’,⁴⁵ and ‘Guinevere’.⁴⁶ Originally distributed privately in 1857, Tennyson’s first two idylls carried the title ‘Enid and Nimue: The True and the False’ illustrating the strongly polemical view which the *Idylls* take towards women.⁴⁷ While this title was abandoned and two more idylls added to the earliest widespread publication, the thematic dichotomy persisted. As such it is interesting to examine the titular women in comparison to each other, in order to clarify Tennyson’s image of false and true women.

‘The Marriage of Geraint’ opens with the suggestion that this once happy marriage is now blighted, and not by the actions of Enid herself but as a result of her friendship with Guinevere and the rumours that are already circulating the court regarding her relationship with Lancelot (ll.24-25). This implants the idea of feminine guilt with the reader before Enid’s story is recounted, ensuring the reader feels that Geraint is justified in testing the faithfulness of his wife. Having half overheard Enid talking to herself about her ‘fear that I am no true wife’ (l.108), Geraint makes the assumption that she is guilty of infidelity. Wynne-Davies (1996: 12) explains that:

Tennyson implies that there are similarities between Enid [...] and the sexually dangerous women of the *Idylls*, offering the reader a doubled vision of female identity in which chastity can never be ensured and sexual danger becomes a compelling and fascinating nightmare.

The assumption, then, is that each woman contains within her the potential for sexuality not sanctioned by society or the church, and as such it is acceptable for Geraint to make abject his wife in order to ensure her fidelity. The reader is shown this process of abjection, and while on the surface the primary purpose of this seems to be Enid proving herself to be the ‘true’ wife, arguably what it actually does is offer up a vision of an ideal marriage and an ideal man.

If in the *Idylls* a woman’s character can be defined by the fidelity she shows to her male counterpart (Ahern, 2004: 88), then a man’s character is defined by his ability to control his womenfolk. The poem makes clear that a woman should value her

⁴⁵ Initially published as one poem under the title ‘Enid’.

⁴⁶ All of which were originally published with the names of the female protagonists as their titles.

⁴⁷ Nimue was changed to Vivien just before the 1859 publication.

husband's life above her own (ll.135-138) and in so doing the reader is left with the impression that the perfect wife is one who is subject to her husband's will. In asserting his will through Enid's abjection, Geraint reclaims his masculine authority, effectively becoming the model to which all the other men in the idylls should aspire. As Knight (1983: 162) argues '[t]his theme will recur through the early idylls, a sense that only in complete dominance, especially of women, can a man be secure in his possession of masculinity'. It is the failure of the other men, most notably Arthur and Merlin, to attain this complete dominance that causes the fall of Camelot, as much as it is the result of the actions of the women themselves. This failure on the part of the men to dominate their women strongly reflects Tennyson's own fear that the society in which he lived was being corroded by the gradually increasing rights of women, and his horror at the impotence of men in power to stop the slow march of progress (Turner, 1976: 17). Perhaps nowhere in the *Idylls* does Tennyson more clearly demonstrate the principal concerns of his text than in 'Merlin and Vivien'.

Vivien is the false to Enid's true, and the imagery associated with her clearly equates her to the tempter in the Garden of Eden. She is several times referred to as 'wily' (l.5), 'lissome' (l. 236) and the reader is told that she 'writhed' (l.237) towards Merlin and '[c]lung like a snake' (l.240). If Vivien is the snake, she is also Eve, the female pursuer of knowledge who causes the fall of man. The Edenic imagery in this scene makes an explicit link to the view Geoffrey offers of Morgan in the 'Isle of Apples' and consequently between the positive liminal power offered by both Malory and Geoffrey. However, Tennyson presents it as neither a place of restoration, nor for the sealing of masculine bonds, but rather as the site for an alternative feminine power which can rival and threaten the dominant patriarchal discourse. As Pèrez (2014) makes clear, there is a connection in Morgan's predecessors between death and creation, and while earlier writers have chosen to focus on her positive healing powers, this association with Vivien and the destruction of Merlin in the liminal wood makes explicit Tennyson's stance on the dangers posed by any female power. In using her sexuality to convince Merlin that she can be trusted, Vivien's character highlights the treachery of womanhood. Following the theme from 'Geraint and Enid', the reader is again confronted with

the notion that women can seem one thing but contain within them the potential for sexual infidelity and can use this to undermine the patriarchal power structure. This is highlighted by the fact that when Vivien first arrives in Camelot, in 'Balin and Balan' written much later, she has all the appearance of a woman acting according to the social dictates of the Victorian age (ll.466-468). Vivien's accrual of knowledge makes her dangerous, more so even than Guinevere, as it is this that ultimately causes the fall of Merlin, and as such precipitates the fall of Camelot.

When Merlin fails to assert his authority, as Geraint successfully does, he is unmanned by Vivien, seduced by her charms and lost forever as a result.⁴⁸ Tennyson explicates his fear about both the fall of patriarchy and of Christianity and lays the blame for both conveniently at the feet of women. Knight (1983: 183) argues that:

the *Idylls* were made partly realistic in terms of the fears they created and satisfyingly ideological for a male and powerful audience by blaming all trouble on the nearest and dearest source of disturbance for the adult male, his assembled womenfolk.

Not only does it satisfy these fears, it reinforces the notion that women need to be kept in a secondary place. If Enid was the example of what a Victorian woman should aspire to be, then Vivien is Tennyson's exploration of what may befall society if this socially constrained role for woman is disturbed. The inclusion of 'Elaine' and 'Guinevere' into the 1859 publication problematizes this portrayal of women, as each contains a mix of both the good and the bad. Elaine is not perhaps as passive as Malory's portrayal of her, and Guinevere is a sexually erring wife, but one who arguably finds redemption through her self-imposed abjection.

In 'Lancelot and Elaine' Tennyson introduces the 'lily maid of Astolat' (l.2) and impresses the reader from the outset with her image of virginal purity. She appears to be the ideal of womanhood, but both Knight (1983) and Barczewski (2000) provide interesting readings of the character of Elaine. Knight asserts that she is not perhaps as passive and pure as a first glance would suggest. She is in love with an

⁴⁸ This is a direct reversal of events as they appear in Malory, where the tale of Nimue and Merlin takes less than half a page to recount, and Nimue is justified in imprisoning Merlin as he is portrayed as a lecherous old man. She uses her knowledge to protect herself from his advances.

unknown knight and within this is the implication that, if she is innocent, it is an innocence that she would willingly cast off at the first opportunity. The language used by Tennyson would support this as he describes Elaine's love affair with the unknown knight's shield as one in which she '[s]tript off the case, and read the naked shield' (l.16).

Barczewski (2000: 174) argues that in fact 'Elaine is [...] no passive recipient of male adoration. Quite the contrary – it is she who is the active subject, she who adores'. Elaine reverses the traditional gender roles by making Lancelot the object of her gaze and in so doing asserts her dominance over him. Lancelot is nowhere more the object of the female gaze than when Elaine takes on the role of nursemaid, attending to his wound in an act of apparent selflessness, but one which has been preceded by the wilful exertion of her desires over that of her father: 'Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear,/ "Being so very wilful you must go,"' (ll.775-777). In this representation of Elaine, the reader is presented with a single character who possesses both traditional female virtues and more subversive characteristics.

However transgressive some of Elaine's behaviour may appear within the context of a Victorian sensibility, a close reading reveals that in fact Elaine's gaze has no power. The reader is told from the first instance that Elaine 'lived in fantasy' (l.27) and consequently any power she thinks she has over Lancelot is constructed in the weak mind of an excitable young woman. Lancelot eventually overtly rejects Elaine's gaze, at which point her fantasy, and her sanity, fracture. Elaine has pursued a man and created a relationship with him in her mind that she would willingly have allowed to become sexual, and while Tennyson removes the suggestion found in Malory that Elaine explicitly offers to become Lancelot's paramour, the offer she makes to follow him in servitude if she cannot be his wife still meets with Lancelot's censure (ll.935-943). Like all other transgressions made by women, Elaine can only be constructed as the pure and true that she is meant to represent if she undergoes a process of abjection. In this case, as with Guinevere, this is a self-imposed process, whereby her 'virginal purity is embalmed in a perverse act of ritual suicide' (Ahern, 2004: 101). What is particularly significant about Elaine's abjection is that it directly correlates not only with fears about female sexuality but also directly with the issue of female agency. She has to be brought

low to absolve herself of the act of using her own will. As this is her own act of censure Elaine demonstrates her internalization of patriarchal societal expectations.

The process of abjection witnessed already through the exploration of Enid's guilt by association is again played out through Elaine. As Elaine has no spouse to absolve her of her sins this abjection ends in her death, and through this act Tennyson illustrates his ideological stance with regard to sexual transgression whereby the guilt lies not with the male but with the female. The ending of 'Lancelot and Elaine' reinforces this as it asserts '[s]o groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,/ Now knowing he should die a holy man' (ll.1417-1418). The reader therefore has foreknowledge that Lancelot is absolved, and thus that the women must shoulder the blame for the fall of Camelot alone, a stance reinforced in 'Guinevere'.

Tennyson started writing 'Guinevere' in 1857, when he gifted the first lines he wrote to his wife:

But hither shall I never come again,
Never lie by thy side; see thee no more –
Farewell! (ll.575-577)

These lines clearly reflect Tennyson's concerns over the 'Divorce Act' as they express the pain he would feel at the prospect of separation from his wife.^{49 50} In all the idylls the morality of the woman is judged by 'her degree of loyalty to a male counterpart' (Ahern, 2004: 88). Guinevere fails to live up to the expectations placed upon her by Arthur, and this is largely because she not only gives herself over to sensual pleasures but because she rejects the purity and divinity that Arthur represents in favour of the more human Lancelot. This brings to the fore the connection that Tennyson makes between declining religiosity, female authority and the feminisation of the male populace under the weight of these threats. One means of the cultural containment of women is through marriage, and 'Guinevere' is largely given over to an exploration of the nature of marriage as eternal and everlasting.

⁴⁹ The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 became known in common parlance as the Divorce Act.

⁵⁰ Tennyson was familiar with the trauma of family breakdown, his own parents having separated as a result of his father's alcoholism.

Despite Guinevere's adulterous and catastrophic liaison with Lancelot, Arthur declares that the bonds made before God are still paramount (ll.561-562). Magruder (1905: 378) argues that:

The whole trend and teaching of these poems is to the effect that the legal bond - the marriage ceremony - constitutes marriage, and, further yet, marriage which holds good for the world to come as well as for this world, even though, as in the present case, the mind, the soul, the will, the affections, all turn the other way.

Yet it is unclear whether all Guinevere's affections do still turn the other way. She herself states that she did not love as she should (ll.649-651), and therefore her repentance is the first stage of her forgiveness. Arthur's statement holds within it the possibility of redemption for Guinevere, but this is something that she can only achieve through the by now familiar process of abjection, which much like Elaine's, appears to be self-imposed.

Critics disagree as to how much agency Guinevere employs throughout the idylls.

Ahern (2004: 97) argues that Guinevere:

chooses [...] to rebel against the constraints of her social position by affirming her right to live her life as she desires. Her freedom of choice is limited by the world in which she finds herself, but she has no qualms about asserting her agency in the one arena in which she as a woman of noble stature can exert control - the arena of love.

In contrast to this, Auerbach (1980: 30) argues that 'Tennyson's Guinevere is little more than a sinister, suffering shadow in the background of the action [...] her one activity is her own fall'. Whichever degree of agency a reader accords Guinevere, the underlying suggestion throughout the idylls has been that she is responsible for much of the breakdown of trust and faith that has ultimately lead to the downfall of Camelot. Consequently, it seems apparent that Tennyson viewed Guinevere's use of agency as the cause for the destruction of Arthur, Camelot, and Lancelot and it is this which leads to her abjection.

Guinevere is reduced, and the reader's perception of her alters as she is transformed from a great queen, to being 'prone from off her seat she fell, / And grovell'd with her face against the floor' (ll.411-412). She must endure hearing herself spoken of as 'the sinful queen' (l.268) and say nothing in her own defence except 'weep for

her who drew him to his doom' (l.346). Part of Guinevere's process of redemption is the acceptance of all guilt. Lancelot has been exonerated prior to these events unfolding, and is again by Arthur (ll.431-433). It is only through an acceptance of all guilt and a subsequent life spent pursuing forgiveness, first from Arthur and then from God, that she can be viewed as fit to meet her spouse in heaven.

The fear of female sexuality made manifest in 'Merlin and Vivien' is heightened here as Guinevere is constructed as the viper in the nest, more poisonous because of her apparent innocence:

She like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,
Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young (ll.515-519).⁵¹

There is nothing worse than the adulterous wife. Not even the 'harlot' Vivien is castigated in such harsh terms, and while the speech that Arthur delivers may seem sanctimonious and self-righteous to a modern audience, the sentiment is inescapable: women are not to be trusted. This is made more urgent as the adulterous wife is a poison to her own children: 'Well it is that no child is born of thee./ The children born of thee are sword and fire, / Red ruin and the breaking up of laws' (ll.421-423). This condemnation of the adulterous mother appears to have been adopted by many contemporary authors of children's Arthuriana and contributes to the continued dichotomous representation of the feminine.

Tennyson places the whole blame for the fall of Camelot on the dangers of education, increased freedoms and authority for women, and thereby makes them the repository for all the faults of his own society, showing just how far he felt society had erred from the ideal. He not only makes the women more serpentine and insidious than Malory does, he also exonerates the men from much of the failure. As an Arthurian text many have found Tennyson to be wanting, but, as a

⁵¹ This quotation is relevant to the subsequent discussion on the motherhood narrative, found on pp.109: 127.

vessel for promoting his own ideological bias, he has created a piece that spoke not only to his own time but also to those that recreate the Arthurian myth in ours.⁵²

The exploration of the canonical Arthurian texts in the English tradition serves to highlight some of the common themes which will be encountered throughout the discussion of contemporary children's literature, namely the depiction of women, the prescribed role for men, and the threats posed to the stability of the nation if each individual does not embrace their pre-determined gender roles within a patriarchal structure. While Geoffrey, Malory, and Tennyson each write from their own time, and consequently approach and represent these issues speaking from their own cultural contexts, what is apparent is that each of these has had a profound impact on the shape of the *Arthuriad* as it exists today. While Geoffrey and Malory's texts have given it the recognisable tropes and motifs, the ideological underpinnings would appear to owe more to Tennyson. Before proceeding to a discussion of twentieth and twenty-first Arthurian children's literature, it is necessary to understand how a myth characterised by its adultery, incest and violence became suitable reading material for children.

⁵² The first edition of the 1859 *Idylls* sold over 10,000 copies in its first week. Later publications were no less successful.

3. The Emergence of an Arthur for the Child Reader

3.1 Introduction

Given the popularity of Arthurian literature in the medieval period and its prevalence in the modern era, it is interesting to note the decline in adult Arthuriana during the Enlightenment. This decline in the Arthuriad's status may account for the vast amount of children's Arthurian literature available in the twenty-first century, as it was in this period that it became thought of as suitable reading material for children. The popularity of Malory as a supposed influence on children's Arthuriana is notable and following on from Malory's seminal work in 1469 the only century in which Malory was not reprinted was the eighteenth (McCarthy, 1988: 172).¹ During this time the tales of King Arthur were thought to be unsuitable for a nation no longer in its infancy and as such it fell out of favour. The Reason for which the age has become synonymous saw no place for the fantastical and supernatural elements of the myth, as MacCullum (1894: 166) explains:

[i]t was the opinion of the soundest and most discriminating critic of that generation and one of the greatest in the whole history of English letters, that Arthurian romance was produced in the childhood of the people, and was fit only for the entertainment of children. "Nations like individuals," says Dr Johnson in his introduction to Shakespeare (1764), "have their infancy [...] Whatever is remote from common appearances is always welcome to vulgar, as to childish credulity; and of a country unenlightened by learning, the whole people is vulgar. The study of those who then aspired to plebeian learning was laid out upon adventures, giants, dragons, and enchantments".

As Dr Johnson highlights, the tales of Arthur and Camelot came to be thought of as literature for children, which resulted in a narrative characterised by incest, adultery and bloodlust becoming bowdlerised for children, and appearing in various forms as texts written and produced specifically for the child reader, such as *Jack the Giant Killer* and *Tom Thumb* which both incorporate not only Arthurian themes and

¹ The 1469 Winchester manuscript was lost until the 1920s. Until this time scholars worked from Caxton's text which was printed in 1485.

characters, but also pocket book versions of selected tales from *Le Morte Darthur*. This development coincided with the advent of children's literature as a category, which as Grenby (2008) discusses, emerged throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

In addition to Grenby's (2008) invaluable work on the child reader in the period of the emergence of children's literature, exploring the use children made of texts produced for them, this chapter draws on the work of other academics who focus on children's literature through the ages. Perhaps the most significant of these is the work of John Stephens (1992), whose wide ranging publications are useful to any study of children's literature, both in terms of his monographs and his work with McCallum, the most useful of which is *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (1998). These works examine and discuss ideology in children's fiction, as well as an exploration of intertextuality. They take a broad view of children's literature as a whole, exploring the power dynamic between authors and readers, and the ways in which previously written texts impact on the production of children's fiction in the late twentieth century. Hunt's (2001) text complements this work, drawing on the theories of ideology in children's texts and adding to the discussion. Hourihan (1997) takes a slightly different angle in her monograph *Deconstructing the Hero*, arguing that the production of stereotypical male heroes is damaging to both female and male readers, and argues for a greater level of interrogation of source materials. She stipulates that this ideology continues to situate Western European males in a position of superiority. This theory is supported by Yarrow (2004), who argues that in the twenty-first century the trends of the twentieth century, as described by Hourihan, have begun to change, and that authors now challenge traditional stereotypes. All these critics explore the evolution of children's literature, and, to some extent, the Arthuriad since it became seen as suitable material for the child reader.

It was only through this ‘relegation’ to the nursery shelves that Arthuriana survived to be reclaimed for an adult audience in the nineteenth century,² with the most significant work of the Victorian era being Tennyson’s *Idylls*. The emergence of an Arthur for the child reader is a complex issue which had an impact not only on the survival of an Arthurian tradition into the modern age, but continues to influence the representation of gender, genre and nation in contemporary children’s Arthuriana. Consequently this discussion will begin to explore some of these issues in order to allow for a close textual analysis of specific examples in the subsequent chapters. It is therefore necessary to understand not only why it became thought of as suitable for children, but the way this was manifested in the eighteenth century and the progression of children’s Arthurian literature into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

3.2 Arthur in the Enlightenment: *Jack the Giant Killer* and *Tom Thumb*

The tales of Jack and Tom Thumb became some of the best loved amongst the newly emergent children’s literature. Due to the literary Arthurian tradition taking precedence over the folkloric tradition, it is somewhat surprising to discover that no record of the Jack tales exists prior to 1711, being notably absent from seventeenth century amusements, including chapbooks and puppetry (Bottigheimer, 2000).³ Opie and Opie (1974: 48) state that ‘the story of Jack the Giant Killer, as we know it, appears to consist of a number of classic anecdotes strung together by an astute publisher in the not-so-long-ago’. While there are two schools of thought with regard to the Jack tales’ link to Arthuriana, most critics agree that they can be traced back to the earlier literary and folkloric tales of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Opie and Opie (1974) seem to suggest that the tale is only tangentially placed in Arthur’s England as a shorthand for the imagination, guiding the reader to certain mental images without the need for

² Spenser did write *The Faerie Queene* in 1590, but this was a political piece written to please Queen Elizabeth I in which Arthurian characters were used to thinly disguise the contemporaneous court. It has had little influence on the Arthurian tradition as it exists today.

³ While chapbooks gave rise to numerous tales which were appropriated by the emergent children’s literature, due to the prohibitive cost of even these cheaply produced texts they would have been read firstly by adults, and then shared among the wider community, including the children.

lengthy explanation. As Green (2007: 123) explains, this suggests that the Arthurian elements of courtly life, giant slaying and Jack's weapons 'are not fundamental to the story of the giant killer', but are rather utilised as part of the tapestry of traditions with which the general reader may be familiar, a tale mapped on to, rather than interwoven with, the giant lore traditions of early Arthurian tales.

However the alternative opinion of the Jack tales' link to Arthuriana suggests a much closer association. Green (2007: 137) continues, arguing that from an exploration of the Jack tales 'it would appear that these "fairy tales" should be treated a genuine elements of the Arthurian legend, embodying and illustrating important points about its nature and development'. I am in agreement with Thomas Green; textual evidence suggests deviations from the literary tradition, but these deviations appear to be a progression from the older and often forgotten folkloric tradition. The reasons for the inclusion of folkloric Arthurian material were twofold: the tales were seen as suitable for the nation's infants, having been written in the nation's infancy, and they could be utilised as conveyers of values thought to be important to the education of young minds.

When examining the issues that surround any discussion of children's literature, Grenby (2008: 8) raises an interesting point, asking:

[i]s there such a thing as children's literature in any case? Might it be more accurate to speak of a boys' literature and a girls' literature? Can children's literature exist for an audience that ranges from infants to pre-teens to young adults and beyond? And is it perhaps really produced for the adults who commission it, write it and buy it, rather than any actual children?

This is relevant at this juncture because while these texts are discussed as 'children's literature', they may be better described as literature for school age children and, as a result of educational practice in the West, this could be interpreted as literature for young male readers.⁴ This is not, of course, to suggest that they were only consumed by boys, and evidence presented by Grenby would suggest that girls often read texts intended for their male counterparts, but this begins to reveal the motivation for writing Arthurian fiction for the child reader. Far from embodying the incest and violence of the earlier medieval texts for adults, these

⁴⁴ The practice of Western education to teach a masculine reader position is discussed in the introductory chapter.

tales are presented in conduct books. Often cheaply made and produced as chapbooks,⁵ these texts were designed to be widely consumed by a generation of males who would be the first to grow up in a rapidly changing social context in which the notion of masculinity was being newly defined.

It was not until 1748 that the word masculinity came to be used in England to mean 'the quality or condition of being masculine' (Fletcher, 1995: 322). While notions of manliness were in existence prior to this time, and in fact the term 'manliness' was still preferred in the Victorian era (*ibid.*), the labelling of that quality reflects a social anxiety surrounding the erosion of gendered boundaries, as ideas of egalitarian marriage and newly emergent voices regarding the rights of women began to alter previously drawn social roles. Consequently, instructive literature for children, such as the Jack and Tom Thumb tales, began to be used in order to demonstrate models of acceptable masculinity, and it was for this that writers turned to the giant lore traditions of the folkloric Arthur. This was popular for much the same reason that Geoffrey utilised this imagery in the twelfth century, as the giant slaying enabled a rebuttal of the male castration anxiety.⁶ However, while Geoffrey used this to displace fears over greater patriarchal forces, the link between the giants and their female counterpart, the witch, takes on greater significance in the eighteenth century as the primary social threat begins to be seen not only as a loss of empire, but coming from within the nation state in the form of women. While this movement clearly pre-dates the suffragist movement that would inform and influence much of Tennyson's writing, the seeds are sown in this period, and this can be seen when reading the model of masculinity presented in these chap books.

The apparently paradoxical nature of an emergent feminism at the same time as the spheres of public and private life were being more rigorously gendered is explained by Shoemaker (1998: 8) who argues that social shifts led men to feel 'that equality might make them effeminate and therefore they felt the need to assert their masculinity outside the home'. This view of appropriate masculine behaviour

⁵ Chap books are small books, cheaply produced for mass consumption.

⁶ While using Freudian theories to discuss Eighteenth century society is something of an uncomfortable fit, as discussed in Chapter Two with regard to Geoffrey of Monmouth it can be a useful tool for understanding the mythical form of the Arthuriad, and the continuation of some features of the tales.

became intertwined with the notion that to assert masculinity meant to suppress women. This combined with the suggestion that power and inherent politeness, not only to other males but to protect the delicate and weak sensibilities of women, were the cornerstones of what it meant to be a (gentle)man. The gendered model of the Jack and Tom Thumb tales become an enactment of eighteenth century fears and aspirations for masculinity, particularly among the socially insecure and newly emergent middle classes. This gendered divide becomes more apparent when the texts' genre is examined.

While usually classified as fairy tales, largely as a result of their sanitised nature for more refined and sensitive Victorian audiences, the tales as they existed in the eighteenth century owe less to the fairy tale genre and more to the hero quest narrative. Such texts are much discussed by Hourihan (1997: 1) who argues that:

[i]n Western culture there is a story which has been told over and over again, in innumerable versions from the earliest times. It is a story about superiority, dominance and success. It tells how White European men are the natural masters of the world because they are strong, brave, skilful, rational, and dedicated.

In drawing on one of the oldest surviving hero narratives, the tales of Jack and Tom Thumb not only reiterate this view but they reinscribe it with the values and aspirations of a rapidly changing society. One of the needs of a society facing any kind of shift in thinking and social structure such as that faced by the growing scientific knowledge and industrialisation of Britain in the eighteenth century is the maintenance of social control. A core feature of the *Arthuriad* throughout its history, and one that becomes increasingly apparent from this period, through the Victorian age and up to contemporary times, is that of gendered control through models in literature. Hourihan (1997), Pinsent (1997), and Zipes (2004) have all noted that one of the principal ways of marginalising certain members of society is the removal of their voice, through either their total omission or through depicting them only in limited or demeaning roles. While this will form a significant part of the discussion in later chapters, it is worth noting here that such narratives not only limit the prospects of women, or indeed anyone 'othered' by such literature, but they also limit the possibilities for male readers when the model offered is reductive, such as that found in much of children's *Arthuriana*.

When a nation is transformed in such a manner as Britain in the eighteenth-century its citizens often feel threatened by instability as a result of such rapid change and thus there ensues an increased pressure among conservative factions to maintain social stability. Therefore societies emerge which are both progressive and regressive, and this conservatism is often seen with the drawing of more firmly delineated gender roles. This clash of paradoxical and irreconcilable differences in ideology can be seen in the newly emergent children's literature of the period, and this concern over the maintenance of the nation state, be that within national, local or international boundaries, becomes entangled at this stage with the maintenance of gendered behaviour. This is made evident in these tales for children through models of masculine behaviour, depicting males as needing to be strong, active, cunning and shrewd. In later Arthuriana for both adult and child readers this is transmuted to the need for women to uphold the social order and for men to be powerful enough to control their womenfolk. The Arthurian society depicted from Geoffrey, through Malory, to Tennyson reflects a nation and later an Empire that foundered through its inability to adapt to change and to control the behaviour of dissolute knights and adulterous women, to control the threat to the patriarchal order, be that from other, male, powers or subversive females. The popularity of Arthurian literature through much of its history has been that it speaks to the fear of the collapse of society and the warning contained within the text as to how this can be avoided. The subtlety and layered representation of this in the medieval texts becomes displaced during the Enlightenment, and the seeds for a negative portrayal of women becomes overt throughout this period, into the Victorian age and indeed continues in much of contemporary Arthurian literature.

A staple of children's literature from its inception, the Arthurian world as seen in the Jack and Tom Thumb tales, with the chivalric code and courtly morals, may be divergent, but the two tales share a core ideology. The tale of Jack the Giant killer revolves around the adventures of Jack, born in Cornwall in the time of King Arthur. While numerous versions of the Jack tales exist, this reading draws primarily on those available in the Hockliffe collection,⁷ and each relates an almost identical tale,

⁷ Held at the University of Bedfordshire. These texts are: *History of Jack the Giant Killer* (nd) *The Pleasant and Delightful History of Jack and the Giants, Part the First*. (nd); *The Pleasant and*

with few alterations. In each, Jack is a young boy, offering not only an appeal to the child reader, but also a way into the stories. Jack's slaying of the Giants, in events which recall those of the early Welsh tradition, concludes with Jack becoming squire to King Arthur's son and becoming a part of King Arthur's court. Much as the later *Merlin* also offers an alternative access point to the story by focussing on the characters when they are young, the Jack tale offers a model for this. The plot of the Tom Thumb tales is somewhat different, and while this tale is available in multiple texts as with the Jack tales, there is more divergence in these texts, although they retain some similarities.⁸ Tom Thumb is born as a result of Merlin's magic, when he learns of the unhappiness of a childless ploughman and his wife. This couple 'could not make themselves happy because they had no children' and '[t]he poor woman said, with tears in her eyes, that she should be as happy as any body in the world if she had a son' (*The History of Tom Thumb: A tale for the nursery*, 1806: 4).⁹ With the aid of the fairies, Merlin grants their wish and Tom is born, an inch in height as an adult, and thus no bigger than his father's thumb. The diminutive size of Tom Thumb leads him into many adventures, and he becomes a knight as a result of his bravery, as signified in the title to Charlotte Yonge's 1855 text *The History of Sir Thomas Thumb*, which 'incorporates more Arthurian material into the narrative than any other version' (Lupack, 2007: 341).¹⁰ Yonge's narrative is made into a 'moral for the young by having Tom learn from his youthful indiscretions not to be mischievous like the fairies but instead to be steady and trustworthy' (*ibid*: 342). Much like Jack, Tom is an unwilling hero, and must learn from his past mistakes. These texts then allow for the frivolity of youth, but make it explicit that this is a state which cannot continue into adulthood, when the male protagonists must adopt the socially endorsed model of masculinity.

Delightful History of Jack and the Giants, Part the Second. (ND); *The Tales of Jack and the Bean Stalk* (nd)

⁸ The texts drawn on for this discussion are: Yonge, C. M, (1856). *The History of Sir Thomas Thumb*; *The History of Tom Thumb* (nd); *The History of Tom Thumb: A tale for the nursery. With three copper plates. A new Edition*. (1806).

⁹ Copies of these texts are available in the Hockliffe Archive, at the University of Bedfordshire.

¹⁰ His diminutive size adds to his appeal to the child reader, as his perspective on the world mirrors their own.

The tales of Tom Thumb predate those of Jack, as ‘the first surviving text to tell the story of Tomb Thumb and to link the diminutive hero and King Arthur was the prose *History of Tom Thumb*’ written in 1621 by Richard Johnson (Lupack, 2007: 340). Unlike the tale of Jack the Giant killer, there is some suggestion that the story of Tom Thumb predates even this, as is alluded to in Johnson’s text, but no manuscript evidence of this survives. Chapbooks written throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, modelled on Johnson’s earlier text, have survived and they relay a model of masculinity in which the hero follows the pattern set by King Arthur himself. A delightful poetical version, *The History of Tom Thumb* (Printed by J. G. Rusher: n.d, 12-13) relates how:

The queen thought Sir Thomas
Too valiant by half
[...]His dignified splendour
Much pleased the princesses.¹¹

This view of the titular hero initiates him into the knightly code of chivalry, and this theme is continued when, wounded in a battle with a cat, Tom replicates the fall of Arthur as ‘the queen of the fairies, now came to see him again, and took him to fairyland, where she kept him some years’ (*History of Tom Thumb: A tale for the nursery*, 1806: 28). Consequently it can be seen that whilst arising in different eras, and representing the Arthurian world through the view of two diverse heroes, both narratives replicate a gendered and courtly ideology. As Lupack (2007: 343) argues with regard to Yonge’s narrative, it ‘foreshadows much of later literature for children wherein knighthood becomes a moral and not a physical or social quality’. The tales are moral in that the protagonist must earn his places at court through his display of moral courage against the odds. The same can be said of the ideology in both the Jack and Tom Thumb tales.

This ideology is drawn from Malory, adapted and transformed to suit the times in which these texts were written. Drawing on the full range of events in Malory and the earlier folkloric traditions, Bottigheimer (2000: 267-8), discussing the Jack tales’ evolution, argues that when they were rewritten for ‘refined sensibilities’ in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ‘the crudity of the gory killings

¹¹ The Hockliffe collection, at the University of Bedfordshire, have several beautiful examples, and I am indebted to them for allowing me access to these texts.

disappears, King Arthur faded away, Jack became an earthly Everyboy, and the giant a geographically unlocalized married oaf, reachable only by the magic of a bean that grew endlessly heavenward'. Many readers today are unaware of the link between these tales and the stories of Arthur, and while they pose interesting questions as to the evolution of Arthur for the child reader, the tales in a form which explicitly links them to Arthuriana have been largely lost in terms of the literature which exists for the contemporary child reader.

3.3 Arthur in the Nineteenth Century

The ideologies of gender and nation remain, and are implicit, throughout Tennyson's Victorian work, which, following the Enlightenment model, overlooks the supernatural elements and instead makes the Arthuriad an entirely human tragedy.¹² One of the notable ways in which this was made manifest in nineteenth century children's Arthurian literature is demonstrated by a series of works illustrated by Gustave Doré.¹³ This beautiful collection of four texts records some of the best known episodes from Arthurian literature in a curiously historical manner. Rather than recounting the tales as a story, they are analysed, and insights are given into how each preceding canonical author has documented the details of the adventures. In so doing, the supernatural and fantasy elements, so familiar from the medieval period and the twentieth and twenty-first century retellings, are omitted from the tales. Arthur is viewed once again as an historical figure, and the layers of the interceding generations are peeled away in order to reconnect the reader to the 'true' history of one of Britain's greatest kings, within a Victorian metanarrative of the then current royal connection to both Arthur and Alfred.

This view of Arthur as a quintessentially British monarch persists, despite the reintroduction towards the end of the century of the supernatural to coincide with the revival of popular interest in such matters. Related to this is the perpetuation of Victorian models of gender. The historicist genre allows contemporary authors wishing to present retro-sexist ideologies a legitimisation of this strategy through

¹² See Chapter Two, pp.49-59 for a detailed discussion of Tennyson's handling of the Arthuriad.

¹³ The Hockliffe Collection at the University of Bedfordshire owns one of these texts, *Enid – the Story of Enid and Geraint from the old Welsh, French, German and Scandinavian Legends*, (n.d).

the use of the argument that they are merely presenting things as they were, despite the textual and historical evidence of the medieval period which belies this claim.

The intersecting ideologies of gender and nation are particularly important in children's literature because of the way many child readers approach a fictional text,¹⁴ and with an understanding of the evolution of Arthurian literature it is interesting to obtain an overview of the way in which this has continued in children's Arthuriana in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

3.4 Twentieth Century Children's Arthuriana

In the post-Second World War years there was a resurgence in popularity of Arthurian texts for children.¹⁵ This is accounted for by Stephens and McCallum (1998: 135) as stemming from 'a nationalistic motive for retelling the Arthur story from a more historical base, as it now becomes an account of the struggle to sustain sovereignty and civilization in the face of invasion from Europe'. The nationalism which motivated many of the retellings in this period was not a new phenomenon, as many Arthurian retellings originate in Britain and thus encode a nationalist ideology. This nationalism has, since the Victorian era, been closely associated with models of gendered behaviour, and this becomes apparent in the first notable work for children in post-World War II Britain. The upsurge of interest in Arthurian literature in this period, and the wealth of material which became available for the child reader, is overwhelming. It is consequently not possible within the scope of this thesis to give an account of all texts of note. Thus the works discussed below are those which have arguably been most influential on the continuing development of the genre.

3.4.1 *Roger Lancelyn Green (1953)*

Robert Lancelyn Green's (1953) *King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table* is an edited version of Malory for children. Published by Penguin at a time when this ensured a large audience for the work, this is a version which evokes all the core motifs of Malory. However, it is subtly different in ideological terms, as it is

¹⁴ As discussed in the Introduction, pp.15-19.

¹⁵ The 1940s and 1950s specifically.

written for and from a different social context. Apart from a vague sense of the gothic which runs through Green's text, a sense that is continued by some subsequent authors through the use of the supernatural, Green's text has had a profound impact on the shape of children's Arthuriana in the twentieth century. Like many other authors, 'Green was quite overt about his purpose, which closely conforms to the Western metaethic in its conjunction of coherent, unified form, cultural heritage, and moral perspective' (Stephens and McCallum, 1998: 130). In reinforcing the importance of cultural heritage, Green continued the nationalist and gender models of the Victorian period, which saw the connection between these two as essential for national stability, something for which post-War Britain felt an acute need.

In creating an historical fiction, Green's work is characterised by what Stephens (1992: 203) terms the main tenets of the genre, which 'may be characterized (if perhaps a little crudely) as follows: there is an essential human nature which underlies all changing surface appearances; important human qualities [...] are transhistorical'. This notion of the transhistorical is implemented in Green's narrative to foster the notion of 'unchanging truths' as 'history imparts "lessons" because events, in a substantive sense, are repeatable and repeated' (*ibid*). This is indicated in Green's foreword, in which he explicitly states 'I have endeavoured to make each adventure a part of one fixed pattern – Arthur's kingdom, the Realm of Logres, the model of chivalry and right striving against the barbarism and evil which surrounded and at length engulfed it' (9). This is followed by Green's assertion that the narrative structure starts 'from the historical Arthur' (10). Consequently, Green makes overt his intention that his text should be read as part of the fabric of history, and therefore as part of the repeated cycle of history. While this text was constructed in the wake of the defeat of 'evil', and the success of Britain in World War II, the sense which suffuses historical fiction of this nature is that of the temporary nature of the success and the need for moral stability in order to avert a similar defeat to that which Arthur faced.

As part of this process one of Green's most obvious influences on the evolution of the Arthuriad was to take early medieval elements regarding the magic of Morgana La Fey and recreate her as the primary threat to the stability of Camelot. In a model

which becomes familiar within hero quest narratives, Green represents the women in his Arthuriad in terms of the good/evil dichotomy. As an introduction to Morgana La Fey, Arthur is informed by Merlin to:

[h]ave good care of the sword Excalibur, and of the magic scabbard of it – and beware of the evil woman who shall steal it from you, she who shall be the mother of the Evil Knight who shall strike you down upon the field of Camlann (77)

In contrast to the depiction of the wicked Morgana, Green presents the reader with Nimue who in Merlin's absence 'must go to his aid' (79) to work with Arthur against the 'wicked spells' (79) of Morgana. Through the creation of the dichotomous females, to aid or hinder the hero, and through expunging certain details thought unsavoury for the child reader, such as the incest which gives rise to Mordred, Green removed residual elements of patriarchal threat, and in so doing created a dark force at the centre of the Arthuriad in the form of the desirous woman. Subsequent authors responded to this model, and in large part the ideology of the Arthuriad remained unchanged throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century.

3.4.2 T. H. White (1958)

The work of T. H. White in his 1958 *The Once and Future King*, followed this model of the marginalisation of the feminine, presenting female characters only as aids or hindrances to the male hero. This was partially related to White's own traumatic relationship with his mother, to the extent that 'White's portrayal of Morgause began as a savage attack on his own mother' (Hadfield, 2012: 421). Hadfield (*ibid.*) continues, arguing that 'the representation of the vicious queen of the Orkneys is a significant element in White's exploration of the nature of violence and the problem of cruelty'. Consequently, White's fantasy conforms to Hunt's (2001: 21) argument that 'British fantasy for children burgeoned after the Second World War, but the tone, rather than being retreatist as after the First World War, was much more uneasy and unsettling' adopting what he described as a 'regressive, nostalgic element of fantasy – which [...] is curiously un-childlike' (*ibid.*: 19). Popularised by the Disney film *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), which was loosely based on the first instalment of White's text, both book and film reveal a discourse

in which there is little allowance for the female voice. As this was the first introduction to Arthur for many children in the period, this ideology had a profound impact on the approach taken to other, subsequently encountered texts, due to retrospective intertextuality.¹⁶

The depiction of Morgause, most notably in the second book in the series, *The Witch in The Wood*, is relevant to any understanding of Morgana's character in *Merlin*, as her overt cruelty can be read as a precursor to this later representation. It is particularly interesting to read this as a possible rebuttal of arguments of postfeminist ideology in *Merlin*. The introduction to Morgause's character is shocking, as she is experimenting 'with the little magic [which] ran in her blood' (229), by boiling a living cat. This is particularly shocking, given that many children have a love for, and affinity with, animals. The shock does not end with this action though, as once the cat is boiled, Morgause:

scraped the remains of the cat into two heaps, one of them a neat pile of warm bones, the other a miscellaneous lump which softly steamed. Then she chose one of the bones and lifted it to her red lips [...] She held it between her teeth and stood in front of the polished brass, looking at herself with sleepy pleasure. (231)

This depiction creates an image of Morgause as needlessly cruel and vain. She enjoys her cruelty and the image of herself which this creates, and admires her own savagery. Hadfield (2012: 420) asks whether 'Morgause is acting unnaturally in destroying another creature so wantonly [...]?' Or showing how terrifying and dreadful nature untamed by civilization can be?' While this is an interesting site for discussion, it matters little to the child reader's introduction to the savagery of the Arthurian world. What is significant is that whichever case posited by Hatfield is correct, the perpetrator of this violence is a woman acting outside the bounds of normal civilization. This event is made more profound through the interspersed images of the chivalric code which counter such acts of barbarism. This is apparent when the knights Gareth and Gawain act to protect the people of Cornwall, as '[i]t was the unfairness of the rape of their Cornish grandmother which was hurting Gareth [...] He hated the idea of strength against weakness' (230). This makes for uncomfortable reading, as it suggests there is such a thing as a 'fair' rape, and

¹⁶ See pp.4: 96 for an explanation of this concept.

because it places the knightly code of conduct, and the imperative to protect the weak, in direct contrast with the actions of Morgause and her persecution of the helpless cat. This depiction also creates the image of the 'other' which includes the actions of women and those of foreign birth.

This post-War text, and many like it, inscribes the message of male dominance, and of the wicked 'other', and reinforces national and gender ideologies in which the English male is superior to all others. Women are largely written out of the narrative and silenced because the domestic sphere, the sphere belonging to women in a society with rigidly drawn gender lines, is unimportant to the plot. Mothers are absent or deviant, and the role of wife only important when she becomes an adulterer, and consequently has a direct, negative impact on the lives of the men in the text. Unlike many narratives, including the medieval source material, the adultery between Lancelot and Guinevere is explicitly drawn, as Lancelot recalls '[t]he usual conniving hand' which 'led him by the finger on tiptoe to the chosen bed' (426). The implication of such a clear portrayal of the adultery is that of the complicity of the lovers in the fall of Camelot. As with many other texts of this era, White emphasises Guinevere's greater guilt, as she is the active pursuer, the conniving seducer, of the innocent and passive Lancelot. In making the affair open, and constructing it in this way, White creates a narrative in which the wantonness of Guinevere cannot be forgiven as it is in Malory. While this view of adultery appears to persist in much of children's Arthuriana, in a rare example of its absence, Susan Cooper creates an updated version of the Arthurian narrative which centres not on Camelot, but on the actions of children in the contemporary world.

3.4.3 Susan Cooper (1965-1977)

Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* sequence comprises five texts which bring the Arthurian world into our own. The story is told through the adventures of the Drew children, Simon, Barney and Jane, and Will Stanton, guided by Merriman Lyon. Merriman is the Merlin figure, an Old One, who fights for the light against the dark, in an obvious analogy between good and evil. Each novel within the sequence recounts the attainment of one object necessary to defeat the dark. It is a somewhat simplistic, but largely enjoyable, narrative, in which Cooper overcomes the need

for any foreknowledge of Arthuriana by ‘divorcing [her] sources from [her] product’ (Mendlesohn, 2005: xxvii). Consequently, ‘children are told what they need to know about Arthur’ (*ibid.*). While this approach may enable a more fulfilled reading experience, as the child reader no longer has to negotiate a variety of perhaps never before experienced intertextual references, this does not divorce the writer from her knowledge of pre-existing texts and thus reinscribing the ideology of these into the narrative. In fact, this encourages a passive reading style, in which children are not given an opportunity to interrogate the textual material.

This is not always a problem, and passive reading can be a very enjoyable experience. However, Cooper actively uses medievalism to critique contemporary values. This is revealed in the text from exchanges between Merriman and Will:

‘Do you know the name of this track?’
‘Tramps’ Alley,’ Will said automatically.
‘That is not a real name’ Merriman said with distaste. (230)

The real name of the Alley is the ‘Old Way’, a name which holds great power, as ‘[t]he only way to disarm one of the creatures of the Dark is to call him or her by his real name’ (230). Names have power, and the erosion of old names as a result of men not paying enough attention (231) is a disparagement of modern society. It is possible to view this as the traditional fantasy trope of imbuing names with a power, and indeed there are other instances within the narrative which suggests the power of naming a thing. The Dark Ones hide their names, and Merriman manages to save Will by uttering the true name of a Dark One (230). It is the distaste with which Merriman expresses his dislike of the new name which suggests the disparagement of the new versus the old, in a way which invokes the notion of the power of a name being in the recreation of a lost ‘golden age’.

As Stephens (1992: 87) explains, the past is invested with more value than the present through such exchanges and ‘[c]ontemporary social discourse is in this way belittled at the expense of a discourse constructed as a replication of past discourses’. In this way, Cooper continues the ideology of history embedded in Green’s text and offers primacy to a medieval discourse on the false assumption that all change equals decay. The consequence of this assumption is the continuation of nationalist ideologies typical of this period in children’s literature,

where the reaction to war continues to permeate textual material. However, Cooper's construction of gender is markedly different, and although she continues to prefer to foreground the male protagonists, the females are not invisible.

The most notable female in Cooper's narrative is Jane Drew, and she has a significant role to play in plot progression in both *Greenwitch* (1974) and *Silver on the Tree* (1977). In *Greenwitch* Jane's actions are more significant than either of her brothers, and the problem faced in reading this text is not in the unbalanced gender depictions, but in the essential passivity of all the protagonists. As Mendlesohn (2005: 20) explains, within Cooper's narrative there is 'embedded an arcane knowledge of one's adult self [...] The Old Ones have inborn knowledge [...] Wisdom and magic are gifts from birth, and this is true even of the (non-magical) children in the sequence'. The result of such a narrative strategy is that all the protagonists are inactive, as they do not have to strive for success or abilities, as these are all inborn and predestined. Innate abilities do not require any sense of one's self to come to fruition. Passive protagonists and uncritical intertextuality thus combine to impose passivity on the reader, and perpetuate an unthinking acceptance of an ideology which denigrates the readers' lived experience.

3.4.4 Rosemary Sutcliff (1979)

Sutcliff's Arthurian trilogy is ensconced within the historicist tradition. Beginning with the author's foreword, which states 'the withdrawal of Rome was the beginning of what we call "the Dark Ages" chiefly because so little record of them has survived. It is to some time early in these Dark Ages that King Arthur belongs' (7). The historical mode is reinforced through a curiously arcane syntax, resulting in sentences which read 'you shall betake you to Camelot, to the King's court at Eastertide' (137). Stephens (1992: 203) argues that Sutcliff adopts this archaic style because the assumptions of the tenets of historical fiction, 'inform the work of most writers of historical fiction for children, and are overtly articulated in the writings of [...] Sutcliff'. This overt relationship between the text and the intertextual sources imparts to the reader the same sense as Green's narrative, in which history is more significant than the present. The past can teach the child reader, and the construction of the narrative is such that this education can take place.

As Lacy (2009: 121) argues, to Sutcliff '[f]idelity to the conventional sources of authority, including not only Malory but also a long chronicle tradition and our knowledge of sub-Roman Britain, means a great deal'. Consequently the historical authority with which Sutcliff suffuses her text is coupled with a close intertextual relationship with her source material. Unlike many modern authors, Sutcliff does not present a dichotomous view of women, and in some senses remains more true to early source texts. This can be seen with the depiction of Morgana, who although shown to the reader 'with her damosels about her' on a horse 'fleet-footed as a Faery steed' in the act of stealing Arthur's scabbard (111), this is not constructed as an outright condemnation of Morgana's character. While many children's authors have chosen to follow the model of foreshadowing Morgana's evil with prophecies which create an archetype, the narrator prior to this provides an insight into Morgana's human side, stating 'Morgana La Fay's heart almost broke within her, for she had indeed loved Sir Accalon' (109). Consequently, while Morgana's actions mirror those of the core plot points of Malory's text, Sutcliff's attempt to provide Morgana with a sympathetic backstory problematize any reading of her as purely wicked, and thus disrupts the dichotomous representation of women. This disruption is continued with Sutcliff's depiction of Guinevere.

The adultery between Guinevere and Lancelot still permeates the narrative, and is more apparent than in Malory's text. The reader is privy to the thoughts as well as the actions of the lovers, and as such witnesses 'the Queen as she sat with her torchlight meshed in her dark hair [...] "Aye, is she not fair?" said Lionel softly [...] And Sir Lancelot said, "Yes" and began instead to watch his own hands' (119). Following these events Lancelot requests the King send him on a quest in order to be removed from the court. While the revelation of the adulterous relationship between the Queen and the best Knight in the land is as bloody and corrosive as in any other telling, Lancelot makes an offer to Guinevere which has the potential to alter the reader's perspective with regard to Guinevere. Lancelot, in a moment which casts him as an active and dominant agent, states '[c]ome with me' (571), and Guinevere refuses, stating '[n]o. I am the King's wife, I must stay and bear the Queen's part' (572). Consequently, though Guinevere at this moment refuses his advances and as such begins her process of redemption, in so doing she can be seen

as openly accepting her guilt and attempting to make amends to her King. Therefore, while the love which exists between Guinevere and Lancelot is clear, as are the destructive consequences for the court once it is revealed, Sutcliff presents a view of Guinevere which most authors omit. This view extends beyond Guinevere's relationship with Lancelot, and the reader also gets a view of Guinevere and Mordred following his usurpation.

When Mordred announces his intention to make Guinevere his wife, she retorts 'Mordred, you are mad!' (603). This overt refusal is followed by her exclaiming 'I am your stepmother!' (604). Her outright refusal of Mordred's offer for her to continue as Queen acts as a counter to suggestions at the end of Tennyson's text that Guinevere was not truly repentant of her 'sin'. This redemption of Guinevere is reinforced in Sutcliff, when she depicts Guinevere fleeing from Mordred as '[s]he had been beyond caring that she was leading her escort into a trap, but the life of every man still loyal to her lord the King was precious to her' (609). This reimagines the final scenes in which Lancelot is often cited as forgiven for his continued loyalty to King Arthur up until his death. While Sutcliff still allows Lancelot to be the last loyal knight, she makes room in the narrative for Guinevere to be forgiven through her continued, active, loyalty to the king. Consequently, this work conveys a slightly more progressive model of women, but this positive depiction of women is not one which most writers choose to reproduce.

3.5 Twenty-first Century Children's Arthuriana

The twentieth-first century has continued to see the rise of Arthurian children's literature, and with this expansion of contemporary Arthuriana there has been a diversification in the number of genres which have been used to recreate an Arthur for our time. These generic forms can largely be divided into the historical, historicist or quasi-medievalist, post-disaster quasi-medieval fiction, contemporary realist fiction (Stephens and McCallum, 1998), and fantasy. Not all of these distinctions are necessary to define in this context, so I will limit myself here to those which are pertinent to the discussion which will follow. Post-disaster quasi-medieval fiction is characterised by dystopian images of the future, in which society has regressed to a 'medieval' state, while contemporary realist fiction plays with

medievalism, ‘using medieval motifs for exemplary purposes’ (*ibid.*: 159) and as such can be argued to self-consciously interrogate their own intertextuality and thus rework the narrative away from the regressive forms of the sword and sorcery fantasy of post-War Arthuriana. As both of these representations are markedly in the minority in terms of children’s Arthuriana, this thesis does not discuss either of these in depth. An exploration of the forms of genre explored more fully in this thesis can be found in the introduction, and relates to fantasy and historicist texts.

While numerous authors have reworked and reproduced the Arthuriad for a child readership, Yarrow (2004: 133) highlights ‘Arthurian retellings for children have been largely static in their content for most of the late twentieth century, discernible from each other through their plot exclusions rather than from their content development’. The result of this has been the repetition and perpetuation of nationalistic and patriarchal models for successive generations of child readers. However, as Yarrow (*ibid.*) goes on to state, since the 1990s an emerging trend suggests that many retellings are ‘revisiting the past and changing both its content and meaning’. This suggests a progressive ideology may be emerging in twenty-first century children’s Arthuriana.

3.5.1 Kevin Crossley-Holland (2001)

Crossley-Holland’s Arthurian series, beginning with *The Seeing Stone*, is one of the first notable children’s Arthurian text of the twenty-first century. Unlike many texts in which authors choose to either firmly base their tales within an historical setting or update them, bringing the Arthurian characters or motifs into the contemporary era, Crossley-Holland has mixed the two approaches, arguably to the satisfaction of neither. His history within a history is slow to get started, and contains a list of characters over the first two pages that details so many locations and characters that the child reader is likely to feel intimidated before they even begin reading. The structure of a boy from a later period who visits King Arthur’s court will be a familiar motif to anyone who has read Michael Morpurgo’s Arthurian texts, but Crossley-Holland’s boy is from the eleventh century. While such a narrative technique enables a challenge to the metanarratives which dominate children’s Arthuriana, the consequence can be to leave the reader feeling they have no-one in

the text to whom they can relate. In a narrative which spans three hundred and thirty eight pages, it is not until over half way through the plot that the Arthur in the stone becomes a significant part of the tale. This occurs when the boy Arthur, in the twelfth century, has seen enough of the events in the stone, his window to the Arthurian world, to wonder 'whether Uther's son will claim the crown, and how the hooded man will be able to help him' (200). The hooded man is Merlin, who is given immortality in Crossley-Holland's narrative, as he also exists in the time of the protagonist.

The presence of Merlin in both time lines creates a sense of the universality of history and the human experience, despite the absence of any contemporary material. This is reinforced through an eventual blurring of the events within the stone and the protagonist's world, which begins when Arthur states:

[i]t is very strange. In my stone, the archbishop agreed to send his messengers to every earl, lord and knight in the country to summon them to London; and this afternoon a friar called Fulk rode in and told us he had come with the blessing of the Archbishop of Canterbury. (223)

The merging of times replicates the notion, discussed in relation to Green and Sutcliff's earlier works, that history is cyclical and thus the lessons of the past and the models of behaviour are still relevant to a contemporary audience, and if these lessons are not heeded then a process of social and cultural decay will ensue.

While Crossley-Holland's narrative focuses on the life of Arthur, and the trials he faces in his life and his increasing absorption into the world in the stone, his narrative finds room for a view of women which is absent in many other narratives, including those supposedly written from a feminist perspective. The story of Ygernia is privileged, and her feelings at the loss of her son are made explicit, when she asks '[w]ho are his foster parents? Where does he live' (202). With these words in a chapter entitled 'Despair', Crossley-Holland allows the reader an insight into the pain felt by the female characters, a point of view usually omitted in a text characterised by the prioritisation of public life over the private sphere within a conservative nationalist ideology. In redressing this balance, Crossley-Holland can be seen as part of a movement away from the regressive ideologies of the Victorian and post-War eras. However, these insights are fleeting, and the temporal

framework confines characters to roles which are limiting within twenty-first century discourse.

The narrative also makes apparent traditional views of nation, and the opening page sees Arthur gazing ‘deep into thick Pike Forest, and away into the wilderness. That’s where the raiders would come from, and where Wales begins’ (1). This view of the foreign ‘other’ and the threat they pose is reinforced through the death of King Richard who was badly wounded by a French arrow (17). The demise of the King is constructed in terms which foreground the dire state in which this leaves the kingdom as ‘it’s likely half the children in the kingdom cried last night’ (22). This sentiment, and the apparent danger faced by the kingdom, spurs the young protagonist’s desire to be ‘[a] squire [...] and then a knight’ (41). Consequently the nationalism which permeates Crossley-Holland’s narrative undercuts the notional female voice. In the case of Ygernia this is through her adoption of the normative female model which conforms to the patriarchal model of the motherhood narrative, and for the young Arthur, both in the stone and the protagonist, the desire is to fulfil their knightly, masculine duty. As such, the characters conform to the stereotypes of the Arthuriad, even if they are somewhat better drawn than many examples.

3.5.2 Phillip Reeve (2007)

It is possible for characters within Arthurian literature to appear to go beyond the stereotypical. Malory’s Guinevere, for example, is vivacious and lives for the reader beyond the page. In contrast to this representations in children’s fiction often leave the reader with the impression that many of the characters fulfil a narrative function but are not fully rounded. Some authors, of course, make attempts to transgress conventional national and heteronormative roles as traditionally depicted in such texts, and Phillip Reeves’ *Here Lies Arthur* (2007) is one such example.

The historical Arthurian text is a relatively new phenomenon, and is characterised by moving away from the medieval setting of the canonical texts to situate Arthur in the Celtic past. Reeves’ *Here Lies Arthur* (2007) is a good example of this kind of text, situating the text in a newly defined historical moment and eschewing the romance associated with the English tradition since Malory. Redressing the romance and sword-and-sorcery elements which characterise other works,

including those by Sutcliffe (1979) and White (1958), these texts aim to give a more historical and less ideologically biased view of Arthur. However, as Stephens and McCallum (1998: 135) suggest '[a]uthors who would write this kind of historical fiction have few actual facts to go on' and consequently they can reproduce the ideology of more familiar reworkings unconsciously. These texts are quite distinct from historicist, or as Stephens and McCallum term them, quasi-medieval texts, in which the historicity stems from the vague medievalism which characterise the texts. They are defined by their otherness to the now, not just in terms of the temporal, but in terms of the moral and cultural.

Writing an historical narrative of Arthur as clan leader and warlord, but most definitely not a king, Reeve questions notions of the 'other' on a national level, but perhaps more strikingly he plays with the gender binary, with a girl dressed as a boy, and a boy who thinks he is a girl. Such manipulation makes apparent the socially constructed and performative nature of gender,¹⁷ a refreshing alteration from more conservative children's texts. This view is limited though, as the protagonists can only explore alternative genders prior to puberty, at which point they must adopt the roles defined by their biological sex. Despite Gwyna's assertion that '[o]n the whole I preferred being a boy' (42) when Myrddin realizes that Maelwas 'sees things other men don't' (125) he concedes that it will not be long before all men realize that 'his boy' is actually a girl. Consequently he instructs Gwyna that '[y]ou've been a good boy, Gwyn. But you'll be a better girl' (127). As if to confirm the correctness of Myrddin's decision, a few nights later Gwyna 'woke with griping in my belly' (135) and the arrival of her 'monthlies'. What is perhaps most significant about this episode is that not only does it undercut much of the discourse surrounding gender performativity, the arrival of Gwyna's period is described by her as 'a punishment' (135). This alludes to the necessary punishment of all women for their inherent sinfulness, and thus Reeve undercuts much of his previous narrative. While the book concludes with Gwyna and Peredur back in their childhood gender roles they reside together as a couple, and thus find themselves

¹⁷ Gender manipulation and cross-dressing in children's literature is explored by Flanagan (2008) in *Into the Closet: Cross-Dressing and the Gendered Body in Children's Literature and Film*.

consigned to a heteronormative model of romantic love, which supports the model offered by the Arthurian texts which preceded this work.

There is much to commend Reeve's text, and this is merely a cursory glance at the management of these issues as he presents them, but it does serve to highlight the difficulty faced by authors in reimagining the stereotypical roles found in children's Arthuriana. Another criticism of Reeve's work can be read from an alternative perspective, in that while his protagonist is female she reimagines her place in society not through liberation of the feminine, but in adopting traditionally male virtues and, in effect, 'out manning the men'. The hero, or the ego, is thus still essentially male, and conforms then to the stereotypical view of male and female attributes. This criticism serves to highlight the difficult line that authors must tread if they are to reimagine the dominant paradigms present in Arthurian literature.

3.6 Conclusion

In exploring these texts it is necessary to consider that it is inevitable that each generation which adopts Arthur will, to some extent, alter the underpinning ideology of the texts. Consequently, this discussion can reveal much about the contemporaneous views regarding nation and gender, particularly as this thesis aims to examine in detail a range of texts. This chapter has looked at the essentially sexist nature of children's Arthuriana from the emergence of children's fiction to the end of the 1980s. Moving forward to the end of the twentieth century Pinsent (1997: 2) argues that 'there is [...] today an increasing awareness that it is unacceptable to depict females as always taking subordinate roles or to regard them as incapable of the heroic actions performed by males'. It will then be interesting and worthwhile to explore the inter-linked notions of gender and nation in contemporary texts in greater detail to examine whether they have managed to formulate a more progressive model, or if, in being seized by conservative mythical speech, they continue to perpetuate outdated models of social roles. This exploration will commence with a discussion of one of the foremost children's authors in Britain in recent decades: Michael Morpurgo.

4. The Implied Reader and Intertextual Ideology: Michael Morpurgo's *Arthur, High King of Britain*

4.1 Introduction

Morpurgo's 1994 text is one among a myriad of texts claiming to be a straight retelling of Malory, while also incorporating some older medieval sources. He has written three Arthurian texts, of which *Arthur, High King of Britain* is the first and the most technical in terms of content and narrative devices which draw the reader into the text. Morpurgo is an important figure in children's literature, having written more than one hundred and twenty books, and having held the post of Children's Laureate (2003-5). His pre-eminence and visibility on the shelves of libraries and bookshops means that children are introduced to his material through these avenues, and are therefore likely to come to his Arthurian work through other books of his which they have read and enjoyed. This sets him apart from some of the other authors mentioned in the previous chapter, and situates this text among those which are often overlooked by academics investigating children's literature, as it is not a 'literary' text but one read, and enjoyed, by actual children.¹ While it is necessary to remain aware that, despite the text's popularity with child readers, some children will still offer resistant readings, the text's continued popularity has contributed to the decision to include it within this thesis. Limited amounts of scholarly material exist which examine and question the ideology of Morpurgo's text, and this is arguably because Morpurgo largely reiterates mainstream values and morals without requiring the child reader to challenge these, consequently appeasing anxious parents and gatekeepers of children's literature. As Stephens (1992: 3) suggests, 'children's writers often take upon themselves the task of trying to mould the audience attitudes into "desirable" forms, which can mean either an attempt to perpetuate certain values or to resist socially dominant values which particular

¹ Evidence from children's blogs and parent blogs suggests that many children have enjoyed this text. Children can, of course, also enjoy literary texts. The distinction here is between texts which critics cite as enjoyable children's texts and those chosen by the child reader.

writers oppose'. This ideological perpetuation is particularly relevant when discussing someone with as significant a role in children's literature as Morpurgo. He is described by Carey (1999: 32) as a 'master of the first-person narrative: when he embarks on a story he doesn't keep you waiting – he simply grips your hand and helps you on board. No danger of slipping down the gap between the story and the teller'. Indeed it is hard to believe that he can have written and successfully sold as many books as he has if children are not enjoying the reading experience which he provides. This in turn suggests that readers are aligning themselves with the implied reader to experience a fulfilled reading, although some readers may take pleasure from actively reading against the text.²

This chapter examines Morpurgo's role as children's author, the lack of critical evaluation of the majority of his texts, and critical attention appears to have been paid only to texts which have been further adapted for film or television. Beyond this, books receive limited reviews when first released and little else. Through researching this chapter it soon became apparent that there is no academic scrutiny of this text, with the only scholarly publication being a book review in 'Arthuriana' journal. Consequently this chapter has a theoretical basis, drawing primarily on the work of academics cited in the previous chapter, in the manner discussed in the summary literature review in the introduction. This lack of attention to Morpurgo's text suggest that there exists an assumption among scholars and gatekeepers as to the acceptability of the message contained with Morpurgo's text. This has an impact on the relationship between the author in the text and the implied reader, and exploring the importance of this relationship to the development of the text's meaning leads to a discussion of the importance of this relationship to understanding Morpurgo's didacticism. This didacticism is particularly evident in relation to the creation of images of nationhood and gender, and is characterised by an echo of White's insistence on the importance of educating the young. This is evident in Morpurgo's model of female representation and an interesting parallel between Morpurgo's representation of the motherhood narrative and Victorian notions of the same as depicted by Tennyson. This introduces a problem with

² See the discussion in the Introduction which relates to the implied reader. pp.15-19.

relying on intertextuality for meaning. While Arthur is marked as English throughout the history of the Arthuriad in the English tradition, this marked patriotism and ideology of nationality becomes muddled with Victorian ideas, inextricably linking gendered identity to national identity. Masculine prowess on the battle field is consequently depicted as a prerequisite for the rightful ruler of Britain (36), riding out to ‘meet the Saxons in battle’ (44). In contrast to this depiction of masculinity as active is the depiction of the court ladies, whom Arthur sees and describes; ‘I gazed on their long white necks, their shimmering dresses, their glittering jewels, and I was in love with all of them instantly’ (32). The women are passive objects of the male gaze, reduced to a collection of body parts. Thus Morpurgo’s idealised representation of womanhood will be shown to be a construct of the Victorian period rather than the medieval period, and while Morpurgo presents this text as a monologic intertextual discourse along Bakhtinian lines, this chapter will explore the way in which he incorporates ideology of a much later period. Therefore his text is subject to intertextual interference from Tennyson. As a result the more nuanced and subtle telling of Malory becomes inflected with a morality and didacticism that the Arthuriad has taken on in the post-medieval period. Before discussing these issues, this chapter will begin with a discussion of the importance of genre, as touched upon in the introductory chapter, and examine the role this plays in the construction of meaning.

4.2 Genre

Morpurgo has written a historicist text, and therefore his style largely reflects Green’s post-War narrative. Consequently, it is necessary to explore the contradiction implicit in combining history with fiction, and how the author’s management of this impacts on the child reader’s experience of the text. Gossman (1990: 223) argues that ‘traditionally [...] history and fictional story telling confront and challenge each other at opposite poles of narrative practice’. At best an historical novel will be a fictitious representation of a period in history, based on true events but allowing for creative license in their telling. A historicist novel, or more specifically a novel which employs *historicity*, goes further than this, extrapolating and stereotyping historical images to suffuse the text with a sense of authority. Morpurgo achieves this in his narrative not only through the construction

of Arthur, the author within the text, but with the closing chapter, in which Arthur states 'I've always wanted to tell my story, our story, as it was, as it really happened' (257). Thus Morpurgo's narrative, along with other texts of the genre, frequently undercuts the reality of the historical period in order to adapt the ideology to his own ends.

Historicity then interplays with the sense of myth imbued by Arthurian children's texts to create the illusion that the retro-sexism and nationalistic ideals are not a cause for concern as they reflect the way things were in some long-distant past. The sense of this distant past is created in Morpurgo as Arthur tells the boy that 'I am Arthur Pendragon, High King of Britain, hibernating these past centuries here in Lyonesse' (14). This ostensibly allows authors freedom from 'politically correct' representations. However, as demonstrated by recent television series for an adult audience,³ there is currently an acute awareness of depictions of race, and an overt attempt to *not* represent issues of race as they were during the historical period depicted. This can also be seen in *Merlin*,⁴ as producers and broadcasters are conscious of the sensitivity of this issue. Children's Arthuriana as a category shows no such concerns over the more opaque issue of nation, and the behaviour expected of those patriotic to England, or Britain, casting all those who do not conform as 'other'. Such depictions are problematic in terms of the issue of race, and when the example above is used to examine gender it is evident that no such scruples exist with the depiction of sexism, with the excuse that depiction merely reflect how things were. Thus the question remains that if racism cannot be shown, why is it acceptable to show sexism?

Both are sensitive issues, but there is a prevailing, and growing, postfeminist movement which suggests that sexism is a thing of the past. With the rise of post-feminism, and the ideology that women are free to do as they wish, and a return to the notion of individual responsibility, the door has been opened for the depiction of retro-sexism. Walter (2010) writes about this within contemporary culture,⁵ but textual examples can also be seen in Morpurgo's narrative. When Morgause enters

³ Such as *Life on Mars* and its sequel *Ashes to Ashes*, both produced for the BBC.

⁴ This will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

⁵ See pp.3: 89: 195.

Arthur's bedroom, Arthur recalls 'the invitation in her eyes' (53), an invitation which he attempts to rebut, pretending to be asleep. Not to be so easily deterred, the overt sexuality, and predatory advance of Morgause sees her climb into Arthur's bed (53). This imagery and the actions of Morgause are more in keeping with what the reader may interpret as modern sexual behaviour.⁶ Consequently, it is possible to interpret Morgause's actions as postfeminist, but they are contextualised as retro-sexist when Merlin tells Arthur 'do not trust [her]' (72). As such her sexuality and her conduct receive censure by the most authoritative voice in the narrative. These depictions in historicist texts work on the reader in ideological and subconscious ways to reiterate acceptable conduct, and indicate how women should behave and be treated, be limited, in order to instigate a return to the golden age of medievalism inspired by myth and historicism.

These texts present themselves as monologic, single-voiced and containing the weight of history as discussed in the previous chapter. This is deceptive, as the sense of history recounted in historicist texts is never monologic, and, as Duff, (2000: 10) argues:

[t]he novel, for Bakhtin, is unique because of its extreme receptiveness to their primary genres [letters, diaries, speech, everyday stories], and because it retains as its structural principle (at least in certain types of novel) the interplay of voices that constitute the materials from which it derives.

Consequently the sense of the monologic created by Morpurgo in his Arthurian text, as reinforced through direct quotations from Malory's text,⁷ belies the fact that Morpurgo has inserted his own ideology and therefore undercut that of Malory's medieval text. This overlay is reflected in the interplay between Morpurgo's author in the text and his implied reader, which combine to lead the reader to find the desired meaning.

⁶ While the adult reader may be aware that sex before marriage, and outside of marriage, has always occurred, the child reader is more likely to perceive this type of behaviour as a modern phenomenon as a result of the cultural discourse which surrounds contemporary sexual practices.

⁷ See p.96 for a discussion of this intertextual usage.

4.3 The Implied Reader

The implied reader is a tactic used by the author to make themselves trusted by the actual reader. In the case of Morpurgo's narrative, this structure involves utterances such as the implied author instructing the implied reader to '[l]ie back now and rest' and 'I'll tell you all about them, I'll tell you all about me' (15). This line at the closing of the first chapter gives the story which ensues the sense of a bedtime story, told by a trusted parental figure. By ensconcing an author and reader in the text within this relationship, the reader is more likely to follow the author to their desired meaning. As Chambers (1985: 98) argues:

[a]t the level of creating the implied reader and of an author's need to draw a child reader into his book, this narrowing of focus by the adoption of a child point of view helps keep the author's second self – himself in the book – within the perceptual scope of the child reader. And the child, finding within the book an implied author whom he can befriend because he is of the tribe of childhood as well, is thus wooed into the book. He adopts the image of the implied child reader and is then willing, may even desire, to give himself up to the author and the book and be lead through whatever experience is offered.

This depiction of the implied reader's relationship with the implied author is somewhat simplistic, and while Morpurgo offers up the image of the unnamed boy, who is arguably the child in the book, as part of the frame narrative, it is difficult to place the author in the book within the 'tribe of childhood'. The implied reader will relate quite closely to the focalizer of a given text; in the case of *Arthur, High King of Britain* with its unnamed boy protagonist, Morpurgo is stating who he wants his reader to be as '[w]hen reading a text a reader is made aware of the kind of reader that is 'desired' by the text' (Cocks, 2004: 94). Morpurgo's protagonist is male (1), on the cusp of adolescence (2) white (every picture depicts him as such, see Appendix D) and British (2). Consequently it is reasonable to assume that the text's implied reader is also a white British male. Such a focalising strategy excludes all those who are not of this kind, or insists that they subsume themselves within the image of the protagonist in order to have a fully realised reading experience. This is a generalisation of the way in which a child reader approaches a text, and as previously stated, many child readers enjoy reading subversively. The view of the subsumed reader is supported by other critics, such as Zipes, of whom May (1995: 66) argues:

[t]he author's rhetorical style controls the reader's response, and that the author shapes his writing to for his adult attitudes about what is "best" for the child's life within the culture surrounding him [...] if children's literature is carefully analysed as language used to form cultural values, it will not reveal "truths reprinted" but will instead show adult interpretations of reality. Rhetoric can create an illusion of truth by the perspective used within the author's retelling of known facts.

If these opinions are viewed with the consideration that the actual child reader does not necessarily respond in the way of the generic and inexperienced reader imagined by such critics then it is necessary to understand the importance of the age of the implied reader, as, recalling Grenby's (2008) introduction to his text, it is not possible to talk of 'the child reader' as a single entity, as this would comprise readers from infancy to adulthood. The age of the implied reader will give an indication, but not a concrete foundation, of the way in which the child reader may approach a text. Pre-adolescent readers are more likely to be readerly readers, and consequently not interrogate the textual material they encounter.

The author of a text chooses the focalizer, and thus the implied reader, making them fundamentally important to the message of the story. It is the implied reader to whom the author is speaking, and therefore the implied reader acts as a powerful device for ensuring that the desired meaning, the moral message or didactic purpose, is found by the reader. However, Chambers (1985: 98) also stipulates that the author within the text will be of the 'tribe' of childhood, and thus will appear in the text as a child or child-like figure. This is not the case with Morpurgo's text. While the focalizer is the child in the text, they are clearly not the author in the text, with this role instead falling to the God-like Arthur, appearing as an omniscient immortal who provides the narration and the weight of history. This works in conjunction with the metanarrative of religious authority, with repeated invocations to the reader to have faith, as Arthur states 'believe I took you from the sea. Believe I carried you in here. Believe those are your clothes drying by the fire. Believe you are lying in my bed' (14). These invocations reinforce the inherent power imbalance in children's literature and lend an overt tone of didacticism to Morpurgo's Arthurian work.

4.4. National and Christian Symbolism

A key element of Morpurgo's didacticism is the continuation of the notion of Arthur as English and those who are not as being 'othered', which is seen throughout the history of Arthurian material and not mitigated in any way in this contemporary retelling. Arthur is linked to locations across England. Morpurgo not only makes him an English monarch, but literally marks him on the landscape of the country: 'There is a swathe of red earth all across the West Country to mark the place where we met them, hunted them down and destroyed them' (46) and '[w]herever you find the earth red' (44) will be the site of a battle between King Arthur and his knights and the marauding invaders.

This not only constructs Arthur as entirely English, marked onto the landscape in a manner that defines the nation for centuries after his time, but it marks out all who are not as 'other'. It does not really matter who the 'othered' are, all that matters is that they are not of the same kind as the implied reader, and are therefore constructed as dangerous. As Saxby (1996: 169) suggests:

[s]uch heroes, because they belong to a specific family, society, tribe or region provide a sense of identity for those whose roots are in that culture as well as a cross-cultural reference in a world where internationalism is seen as desirable; but not at the cost of losing pride in one's country.

Not only do texts which do this disempower all those that are 'other' because they are not white and European, they also disempower all those who are not male.

4.4.1 *Christian Symbolism*

While the sense of 'otherness' explained above creates a didacticism in relation to nationalist ideologies, this didactic element can also be read in the Christian symbolism that pervades Morpurgo's text. This is not, of course, an element invented by Morpurgo, and Christianity and Arthuriana share a long history. In medieval literature soon after Geoffrey's text the introduction of elements including the reluctant hero and the miraculous birth, combined with the prophesied second coming of Arthur lead to parallels with the Christ figure. While Malory was arguably the first to make this link explicit, a consequence of the persistence of the link between Arthuriana and the conservatism of Christianity is that the depiction of Eve and the Virgin as polarised images of the dichotomous female can be read

into Arthuriana, and are particularly prevalent in Tennyson's Victorian work. The gendered pattern of Christianity, which prevails despite notable works to reclaim Eve with reference to the textual evidence of both the Bible and the Apocrypha, leads to an interesting reading of gender in Morpurgo's contemporary text.

Eschewing the more obvious images of female representation such as the Lady of the Lake and Morgana La Fey, Morpurgo prefers to focus on the patriarchal image of the Christian God and Christ figures, layering his text with references to these which go far beyond the obvious parallels raised through the omnipotence and physical appearance of Arthur (see Appendix D). Images such as this, which appear throughout Morpurgo's text, highlight the fragility of the child next to the eternal Arthur. This is made more pronounced by the nakedness of the child, and the comfort and warmth he receives through Arthur's generosity. Such images reinforce the power imbalance inherent in children's literature, which arises through the traditional asymmetry between the participants in the textual discourse, and this is particularly prominent in this example. This combines with the other Christian symbols, which will be explored below, to disempower the child reader's ability to produce a subversive reading through the weight of the combined metanarratives of religion and history. Of course, not all readers will approach the text with a foreknowledge of Christianity, and consequently they are likely to be less affected by the use of Christian symbolism and the God/Arthur parallel. However, this discussion is more concerned with the implied reader, and thus the reader desired by the author, and as such this symbolism remains significant in understanding Morpurgo's ideology.

Christianity is present in Morpurgo's text even before the reader is introduced to Arthur, beginning with the line '[i]t was as if Moses had been there before him' (3),⁸ and pervading the story from this point on. Even before the boy sees Arthur he expresses his hope that 'there was a heaven' (9) and when rescued by Arthur, he initially mistakes him for God as '[h]is hair and beard were white and long' (11). The boy asks Arthur '[a]re you God?' (11), and even though Arthur denies this, his

⁸ The mention of Moses refers to the Old Testament, and consequently to Judaeo-Christian religions. However, Morpurgo continues the Christian references by incorporating references to the New Testament.

assertion shortly afterwards that 'I have had dreams and my dreams tell me my time is coming, that I will soon be needed again' (12) aligns Arthur with the notion of the second-coming of Christ. As a result, before the reader hears Arthur's story they are aware that part of the ideology of this text is that of Christianity and the reader is clued in to the expectation that they will read this as part of the core message, the moral underpinning, of Morpurgo's narrative. The inclusion of Christianity is part of Morpurgo's discourse with an idealised medieval period. According to Stephens (1992: 112) such medievalism:

[i]nvolves the invention of an alterity of time and place which, although more primitive, is also somehow nobler, and of a society whose beliefs, structures, rules and obligations are clearer and more open than those of the society inhabited by the writers and their audiences.

The society depicted in Morpurgo's Arthurian texts is clear, if not more open, than contemporaneous society. Its lines of hierarchy are clearly drawn; it portrays an illusory society where everyone knows their place, something which may be an appealing prospect for a pre-adolescent. As Arthur takes the throne the reader learns that '[i]n Britain now there was one God, one king and one law for everyone' (188). Merlin too is essentially a God figure, appearing as omniscient and omnipresent as '[h]e knows everything that has been and everything that will be' (19) and whose powers come from God (37). Together they complete their Holy mission to create the 'paradise on Earth' (23) and 'the Kingdom of Logres, God's own kingdom on earth, here in Britain' (39). As Dixon (1977a: 125) argues 'the religion-royalty connection [...] is understandable to some extent and, of course, runs throughout the Bible but we shouldn't lose sight of its social significance'. In Morpurgo's text the religion-royalty connection contains a weight of cultural significance in which the king conveys the authority and morality of the Christian God, being both his representative on earth and overlaid with the significance of Arthur's miraculous birth. In this instance the morality which is overt, the explicit ideology, is that of the New Testament, whereby Arthur teaches the knights to turn the other cheek, to forgive their enemies, and that justice can only be given out by God. Most significantly he teaches forgiveness; '[h]ave I not taught you that evil can never destroy evil? Only good can do that' (78). Therefore it can be interpreted that Morpurgo uses elements of Christianity to give the reader a clear moral message

about how the reader should and should not behave, providing an intertextual relationship with Malory which relates to more than gender and nation.

4.5 Intertextuality

Drawing on the innate power imbalance which exists in children's literature between its producers and purchasers, or gatekeepers, and its consumers, Wilkie (1996: 132) extends this discussion to relate to intertextuality, arguing that children are 'the powerless recipients of what adults choose to write for them and, *de facto*, children's literature is an intertextual sub-genre of adult literature'. This position is contentious on the grounds that written material is widely perceived to have an inherent truth value. This stance also refutes the possibility of children procuring reading material not expressly intended for them, and the ability of readers to produce subversive or alternative readings. In addition to this it suggests that material produced for children will echo and replicate that produced for adult readers. This is demonstrably not the case, as evidenced by Arthurian material written for adults, such as Marion Bradley's (1983) *The Mists of Avalon*, widely held to be a good example of a feminist revision of the Arthuriad. This is in keeping with a general trend for female (and male) authors of fantasy fiction to use the genre to allow a liberation of the female from tradition patriarchal constraints, imagining the world as it *might* be rather than recreating an image of how it is, or how it was, to perpetuate sexist stereotypes. This argument can be extended to look at the ways in which contemporary authors of children's Arthurian literature use the inter-text to create dynamically altered ideologies to those found in the Ur-text. The Ur-text is not a single text from which authors draw, but rather a collection of threads which form together in the collective mind of a culture. Barthes (cited in Wilkie, 1996: 133) describes the Ur-text as 'lost codes'. Wilkie (*ibid*: 133) explains that they comprise:

tales [which] are intelligible because they build on already embedded discourses which happened elsewhere and at another time; they are part of the sediment folk memory of discourse and they function now by the simple fact that other tales like them have already existed.

Whilst Morpurgo draws on Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* as his primary inter-text he is also influenced by a wealth of Ur-text material which can be seen at the core of

his text, its intertextual resonance and its ideology.

Morpurgo's use of Malory as his primary inter-text, or primary source text, leads to an inextricable intertextual relationship between the two texts. As most readers are more likely to encounter the Morpurgo text before developing a sufficient interest in Arthurian literature to move on to Malory's more taxing work, it serves a scholarly purpose to understand the way in which Morpurgo has manipulated, and in many cases subverted, Malory's version. As the first text a reader encounters will be the 'original' from which to approach and on which to base their later reading of alternate versions (Wilkie, 1996: 133) it is reasonable to make the assumption that what remains with the reader, what they export from the first text encountered to the later read text, is the sense of the ideology of the text; the belief systems and moral code inscribed by the author. It would be reasonable to suppose that, in relating so closely to a primary inter-text, later works, such as Morpurgo's, share a good deal of the same ideology as the inter-text. Indeed, on a cursory surface read they do both create an ethical code of behaviour and both have been read as having a didactic purpose. Morpurgo makes his didactic purpose clear; his Lancelot tells Arthur '[i]f you could only teach the children [...] then you could really change the world' (110/111) and the change they aim for is the Kingdom of Logres, the kingdom of heaven on Earth. Morpurgo's *Arthuriad* is a didactic device, following the model of White, with the intention of asserting the importance of teaching children. Malory also has a strongly didactic purpose. It is this ethic, this certainty, which lends Malory's text both its ideology and its didacticism. While the surface ideology of both texts appears to be the same, the medieval world of Malory maintains this through its layers of ideology. The same cannot be said of Morpurgo's work, which, on the surface, reads as a simplified version of Malory. Morpurgo departs from this inter-text only to recount the tales of Percival, Gawain and Tristram, for which he draws on older medieval sources, but for the life of Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere he claims a representation of Malory for a contemporary children's audience. On an ideological level this medievalism serves as a cultural signpost to the reader, instructing them to behave in a manner akin to the morals and codes of conduct of a bygone era. When presented in reworkings of myth this ideology possesses a psychological influence that is lacking in other,

newer forms of literature. Karl Jung (cited in Segal, R., 1998:100) argues that '[a] great deal of education goes on through story-telling' and an effect of this in ancient tales is to relate the message that 'our ancestors have done so and so, and so shall you'. Morpurgo compounds this feeling of a universal and unceasing morality and social order not only by maintaining similar surface ideology, but through his manipulation of key episodes and in the echo he creates of Malory's language.

An early example of this in Morpurgo's text can be found in the Gryflet episode. Seemingly included by Morpurgo because of its significance to Arthur's obtaining of Excalibur, his adherence to the inter-text at this juncture is striking. While Malory's Arthur says:

thou shalt promise me by thy feyth of thy body, whan thou haste justed wit the knight at the fountayne, whether hit falle ye be on horseback othir on foote, that right ye shall com agayne to me without makynge any more debate' (pp. 44/5).⁹

Morpurgo's Arthur instructs '[r]ide against him only once. If you are unhorsed, then you are not to fight him on foot [...] You promise me now?' (55). The speech of Morpurgo's king echoes Malory's to such an extent that when reading Malory any reader already familiar with Morpurgo's text is likely to be reminded of the text which they encountered first. It is in this way that such intertextual references bleed into the inter-text. Intertextuality is often thought to be unidirectional; books written in the past are read by authors and used accordingly, with the assumption that readers will encounter books in the same order. If they have not encountered the inter-text before, then vague allusions will likely pass unnoticed and have no effect on the reader's experience or interpretation of the text. But intertextuality can also work retrospectively. A reader carries into the inter-text the sense and ideology of the later written but first read book, thus affecting their interpretation of the later experienced text. This may seem to be unimportant if, as discussed so far, the later text replicates the ideology as well as the events of its inter-text.

Bakhtin describes an intertextuality which replicates, or appears to replicate, the

⁹ Translation: 'you shall promise me, by the faith of your body, that when you have jousting with the knight at the fountain, whether you are on horseback or on foot, that you will immediately return to me without trying to fight him again'.

ideology of a source text as monologic; containing one voice, typically that of a top-down, hierarchical, universal truth variety that leaves little room for alternative reader perspectives. Allen (2000: 19) explains this idea of monologic intertextuality as one which may on the surface seem clear but which actually contains multiple layers, when he argues '[a]n utterance, such as a scholarly work, may present itself as monologic [...] yet it emerges from a complex history of previous works and addresses itself to, seeks for active response from, a complex institutional and social context'. A work of literature, such as Morpurgo's, which claims a monologic voice, is no less complex. It may use the same scenes, indeed the same words, but it speaks to and from a different social context and as such a singular interpretation, such as the one alluded to by Morpurgo, is a simplification of the actual relationship between text and inter-text. Intertextuality is more than just the reference of one text in another, however detailed this reference may be. Drawing on the work of structural linguists such as Saussure, the ideas of psychoanalysis, and the notion of displacement and condensation, theories perhaps better known to literary scholars through linguistics as the terms metonymy and metaphor, Kristeva added a third process to Bakhtin's notions of intertextuality. Kristeva (Kristeva, 1986: 111) argues that it is not merely the placement of one idea within another, but a transference, as it also 'involves an altering of the thetic *position* – the destruction of the old formation and the formation of a new one' (*italics in the original*). This shift in thetic position can be seen when Morpurgo's text is examined beyond its surface meaning.

Malory provides the actions of those involved, expanding this to relate Merlin's warning of Gryflet's future importance and the promise Arthur demands of the newly made knight. Morpurgo, in his attempt to fill in those tantalising blanks and reveal the characters behind the actions, gives the impression of a very different Arthur. His Arthur sends Gryflet to fight with King Pelinore because 'if I'm honest, I was more than a little reluctant to face this Pelinore' (55): a picture of an Arthur few familiar with Malory are likely to recognise. These differences not only represent a different portrayal of certain characters, but also a shift in the ideological foundations of the tale. The medievalism of the Arthuriad, which, when rewritten for children, is at heart a hero-quest narrative, betrays the contemporary author's

unconscious assumptions regarding the role of persons who do not conform to the norm of the masculine hero. Hourihan (1997) suggests that such hero-quest narratives, unlike their medieval sources, often subjugate female characters, making them inferior to the questing male hero. This can be seen in the comparison of the two texts in question. While Malory brings to the fore all of his characters only when they have a direct impact on the historical events of his narrative, Morpurgo has, in the modern style, given his characters a more human side than that seen in the source. The difficulty this presents though is that he does not do this universally. In Morpurgo's text, not all characters are created equal and this is perhaps most notable when they are examined along gender lines.

4.6 Gender

Before turning to perhaps the most striking example of this, that of Morpurgo's representation of Queen Guinevere, it is worth discussing his depiction of Morgana La Fey. Like all the female characters in Morpurgo, she is barely visible, and the narrative allows no room for her voice. This on its own would marginalise her and position her as 'other'. What is perhaps more worrying is that Morpurgo reveals both his didacticism and his layered ideology as he elevates Merlin and Arthur whilst at the same time directing his readers to see Morgana as deviant from the cultural norm. Merlin informs Arthur, before Morpurgo introduces any of his sisters, that '[o]f all the people on this earth, she is the one who most threatens you. She may look like an angel, but she has the soul of the very devil, and all his evil powers too' (73) and that Morgana and her sisters 'will not stop until they have destroyed you' (43). Such foreshadowing of the events that follow gives the reader little opportunity to forge their own opinion of Morgana's actions, motivations or character; she is simply wicked. This foresight creates Morgana as a *Femme Castratrice*,¹⁰ and simultaneously elevates Merlin to the level of omniscient God-figure, and does the same for Arthur by proxy. This is echoed in the episode where Morgana orchestrates a battle between Acolon and Arthur. Morpurgo's Acolon is Morgana's unwilling dupe rather than her paramour as Malory has him, making her

¹⁰ This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

more powerful and wicked than she appears to be in Malory's text. As a result of Merlin's warning, Arthur knows that 'this was all part of some devilish plot by Morgana. It had to be' (85). This not only dissipates the tension of Malory's text, but also removes many of the layers of meaning and interpretation that are possible at such moments, instead simply elevating Arthur and denigrating Morgana.

Morpurgo's casting of Morgana as the inescapably deviant 'other' is continued even after she disappears from the narrative, as he portrays her as an anti-mother to Arthur's nephew/son Mordred. She is not Mordred's mother, she does not even raise him; she is rather the instrument of his birth and can therefore be read as his proxy mother. The reader is left in no doubt that the actions of Mordred, and the part he plays in the destruction of the Kingdom of Logres, are in fact a direct result of Morgana's influence. If the reader is in any doubt about the elevation of Arthur above any culpability for his own downfall, Morpurgo also makes it clear that Arthur should be absolved of all blame for the conception of Mordred, the instrument of his own doom. Where Malory has Merlin state '[b]ut ye have done a thyng of late that God ys displeased with you, for ye have lyene by youre syster [...] hit ys Goddis wyll that youre body sholde be punysshed for your fowle dedis'¹¹ (I. p. 32), on the same event Morpurgo's Merlin explains '[t]here is no blame on you [...] You were enchanted, bewitched. Morgana La Fey planned it all' (74). In representing Morgana in this way Morpurgo provides a manipulation of the source material which betrays a worrying ideological stance towards women, and if this is notable in Morgana, it is most apparent with regard to Morpurgo's depiction of Guinevere.

Malory's depiction of Guinevere is that of a vibrant queen who is at turns strong, stropic, vivacious and temperamental. Particularly in the last two books, she comes alive perhaps more than any other of Malory's characters. She plays a pivotal role in the events of the narrative and her chastising of Lancelot and impassioned love, which comes through in some fairly lengthy speeches, provides the reader with moments of delight. The reader may not understand Guinevere, and there are

¹¹ Translation: 'But you have done a thing recently that has made God angry with you, for you have slept with your sister [...] it is God's will that your body shall be punished for this foul deed'.

undoubtedly facets of her personality, as with all Malory's characters, that readers are not privy to, but the reader may still feel that they are there. In contrast to this, Morpurgo's queen is virtually written out of the book. She appears little, and speaks less. There are only eight pages on which Guinevere has a voice, and, rather than being feisty and strong, she whinges, whines and mopes. She half starves herself for love of the missing Lancelot, here not mad due to Guinevere's banishment of him but rather under a self-banishment because of the guilt he feels over his love for Guinevere. When Guinevere does speak, Morpurgo shows her in a way many contemporary readers may see as pathetic and needy, such as when Arthur returns from the fight with Acalon when she whispers '[o]h stay by me, Arthur [...] Never leave me again like that. I cannot be without you. I cannot' (93). Alternatively she appears as an oracle of doom, when rather than hiding her love for Lancelot she again whispers to Arthur that, despite the certain knowledge that there will be civil war if Lancelot returns, if '[h]e is not dead [...] he will come back to me [...] I know he will' (220).

Of course, readers of both texts are forewarned that Guinevere is not to be trusted, but while Malory's Merlin introduces a subtle warning 'that Gwennyver was nat holesom for hym to take to wyff' (62),¹² Morpurgo's Merlin explicitly states '[m]arry her and you will bring yourself nothing but misery. Marry her and it will spell your ruin and the ruin of your kingdom' (51). While the surface meaning of these words is similar, the context and power of the utterances bring a different sense to this apparent monologism. In Malory this is a sentence, quickly passed over and leaving no lasting effect. In Morpurgo it becomes almost too human, with Merlin and Arthur falling out and only reconciling when Arthur is nearly killed by Pelinore. Indeed even the conception of Mordred could be blamed on this incident as without this disagreement Merlin would have been there to warn Arthur against sleeping with Morgause.

While keeping with the core plot points of Malory's text, Morpurgo subverts them to alter its ideological function. Such clearly drawn ideological lines in relation to

¹² Translation: 'that Guinevere was not wholesome (good) for him to marry'.

women belie Morpurgo's claim that this, in his Arthur's words, is 'the truth' (257). Such a stance falls directly into the category of Bakhtinian monologic discourse, attempting to leave no room for interpretation or alternate readings. The reader is presented with an undisputed truth, directly from the mouth of the man who lived it. Outside of this narrative device it serves the same purpose, whether through Arthur or Malory, Morpurgo presents the same 'truth' with a similar weight of authority. Such authority lends credibility to his ideological stance with regard to the culpability of Guinevere in the fall of the Round Table. Edwards (1996: 47) argues that in Malory 'in its hidden state, adultery sustains the lateral political ties of fellowship; exposed, it causes a swift reversion to hierarchical feudal relations', and indeed Malory goes to some lengths to stress to his reader that Guinevere was true and thus came to a good end. Morpurgo, however, has the infidelity of Lancelot and Guinevere dominate the narrative, which combines with other narrative devices to cast the women of the Arthurian world as the villains. Such a blurring of the ideology of the primary inter-text in the later written text can be argued to be largely influenced by the Victorian reading of the Ur-texts codes, as embedded in Tennyson's work. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, in relation to Hoffman's *Women of Camelot*, but it is interesting here in relation to another aspect of the gender question which ties closely to that of nation, and that is the motherhood narrative.¹³

4.7 The Motherhood narrative

Jung (1969) argues that the hero in myth is the character whose mother is twice dead, in Arthur's case this is through his adoption and through his rebirth as King at the moment when he extracts the sword from the stone.¹⁴ In her absence the mother figure shapes her male offspring. Within the Victorian retellings, most notably that of Tennyson, a shift can be observed from the depiction of the maternal from not only the absent, to the potentially harmful, and the morality of the mother,

¹³ This is touched upon in the discussion of Morpurgo's handling of the character of Morgana La Fey.

¹⁴ The removal of the phallic sword from the stone is curiously reminiscent of the female action of birthing, rather than the male act of penetration, and consequently at this moment, Arthur could be argued to give birth to himself as King.

present or not, has the potential to determine the character of the male child, and with this the stability of the nation. One interesting feature of this comes from a broad range of myth, and can be seen in traditional Arthuriana. It arises from the willingness of the woman to consent to an adulterous relationship. In terms of Arthur's conception, this can be viewed as a deceptive rape and, as the unwilling adulteress, Ygraine is 'rewarded' with the male offspring of this violation becoming the hero. Morgause as the willing participant in an unlawful match instead sees her male offspring, Mordred, become the anti-hero. Morpurgo continues this tradition in *Arthur, High King of Britain*.

Maternal power has long been viewed by men as an area of threat to patriarchy, as in acknowledging maternity there is an inevitable need to acknowledge the source of female power, which in turn disrupts the Christocentric and phallogentric doctrines of much of Western ideology and risks returning to the gynocentric and romanticised pagan ideals which were believed to predate these. For this reason many depictions of motherhood align themselves with images of the anti-mother, and thus highlight the dangerous and consuming power of the sexually desirous woman. As Whitford (1991: 28) argues 'man needs to represent her [the mother] as a *closed* volume, a container; his desire is to immobilize her, keep her under his control, in his possession, even in his house' (italics in the original). The desire expressed by Whitford is one in which the dichotomy of representation, that of the virgin and the whore, is able to be left intact despite the knowledge that a mother *must*, through the process of reproduction, be, or at least have been, sexually active. This is possible through the male system of control which ensures patrilineage. In this way she is seen rather as a receptacle for the continuance of the male line, and only when the woman steps beyond this does she become a threat to the patriarchal order. While the role of the anti-mother in this dynamic will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven, with reference to Morpurgo and his claim to a Malorian intertextuality, it is worth noting the shift in the dynamic from the view of mother as mere 'receptacle for the (re)production of sameness' (Whitford, 1991: 28), to that of a subversive power, able to corrupt her progeny even in her absence.

While Farrell (2012) claims that *Arthur, High King of Britain* is a 'Camelot

highlights' lifted almost exclusively from the pages of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, as the above discussion has revealed this is not a straightforward monologic relationship. This is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the issue of maternity, and Morpurgo appears to have transposed the views expressed by Tennyson, at a time when gendered behaviours and national stability are seen as symbiotic, into his text, omitting to reference the rather more liberal views of Malory.¹⁵ While this may be surprising, suggesting as it does an acknowledgement of feminine, or more specifically, maternal power, it reflects the resurgence of the fear surrounding the *Femme Castratrice* and the figure of the consuming wife and mother.

4.7.1 Maternity and Nation

The *Femme Castratrice* and the fears that surround the castrating woman are in Morpurgo's depiction concerned less with the anti-mother's desire to harm pregnant women and children, and rather reflect the patriarchal concern with her ability to cut off the male's power, to castrate him, either physically or psychologically, and consequently to undermine the political stability of the nation. It is this fear which is represented in Tennyson's *Idylls*, as evidenced by the likening of the children of an adulterous, or wicked, wife to the invading hordes of heathens which had previously threatened the stability of the nation. It is this ideology which Morpurgo reflects in the children of Arthur and Lancelot, and the corrupting influence of amoral women is made more striking by the absence of the mother in the rearing of both children. This is first apparent in Morpurgo's text when Arthur's bastard son initially appears at Camelot. This occurs during the same exchange in which Merlin expunges all blame from Arthur for the circumstances surrounding Mordred's birth. Not only does this lay the blame for the sinful conception with the women, it also further casts the sisters into the role of dangerous women, as Merlin explains to Arthur that Mordred 'is the weapon Morgana La Fey will use against you' (74). Morpurgo reinforces this position when Merlin states:

Mordred is your Judas, Arthur. He will betray you. It is for that he was conceived, and it is for that he will live his life. Never forget that he is the creature of Morgana La Fey, and that she is determined to destroy you' (75).

¹⁵ See pp.57-8 for a discussion of Tennyson's depiction of maternity.

This is striking because from this point on Mordred has no obvious contact with either Morgause or Morgana. However, there is a recurrent presence of a white screecher-owl which suggests a supernatural element to Morgana's influence over Mordred. This symbol is first introduced when Morgause negotiates with Arthur to leave their son in his care, not as his son, but as his nephew (80). Arthur notes that '[t]here was a large white screecher-owl eyeing me from the window ledge. It did not fly off as I expected, but glared at me, unblinking' (80).

Birds appear repeatedly throughout the text as symbols. The robin, which leads Arthur to the sword and 'sang out again as I took the sword in my hand' (35) carries the symbolism of both nation and Christianity. Not only does Morpurgo relate the robin expressly to Merlin (40), and Merlin's powers directly to God (37), traditional Christian tales record the link between the robin and Christ in two distinct fables; '[t]he story goes that the Robin felt Christ's agony during the Crucifixion, and went to pull a thorn from His brow [...] the Robin was blessed for the act of heroism' (Miller, 1996) and:

a legend that the robin received his red breast as a reward for protecting the Christ Child from the sparks of a fire, which he caught on his breast, while the Holy Family rested on their flight into Egypt. (Catholicism.net, 2004)

They are symbolic of the passion of Christ, of divine sacrifice and rebirth. Placing a robin in the text at the precise moment when Arthur is reborn as High King, as the Once and Future King, ties him directly to the figure of Christ. It gives his rule both implicit and explicit divinity, and consequently the unfolding events can also be read in terms of their biblical significance.

In addition to the robin, Morpurgo also uses other birds in a symbolic way. Just as Arthur discovers the adultery between Guinevere and Lancelot he recounts the following scene:

a gang of crows came cawing over and flew down to harry the peregrine off his perch [...] the peregrine took fright and lifted off, flapping wildly [...] He flew straight into the trunk of a tree and fell like a stone to the earth where he lay still, only the wind moving his feathers. (208)

While the symbolism of the robin is only alluded to in the text, this episode is clearly explained when Arthur tells Lancelot '[i]t is a sign. This is what will happen to me.

Like the crows, my enemies will gather again to finish me and it will be the end of the Kingdom of Logres' (209). Such declarations in the body of the text make the symbolism of these birds obvious to the child reader, however that of the white screecher-owl is less clear, and requires a reader of more mature abilities in order to decode this inference, although given the weight of symbolism given to birds, and the repetition of the appearance of the owl, it gives a feeling of the uncanny even to the inexperienced reader. Those capable of formal operational thought are more likely to see this, but it remains a point of interest in terms of the motherhood narrative inscribed in the text, and the gender ideology Morpurgo displays at the implicit level.

Owls have a folkloric association with witchcraft, often being seen as a witch's familiar, and consequently possessing unnatural or uncanny abilities (Lewis, 2005). In addition to this they have an association with *The Mabinogion*, the Welsh tales in which the adventures of Arthur are recounted, in which '[o]wls were also associated with Blodeuwedd, the goddess of betrayal' (BBC, 2014). The appearance of the owl in daylight is also significant as the sight of the white, or ghost, owl during the daytime is seen as an omen of ill-fortune, and it was believed that the sight of one would portend death. The placement of this owl in proximity to the infant Mordred following Merlin's foreshadowing of the disaster he will bring links this owl to Morgana. The reader knows that Morgana is a witch, and that Mordred is her weapon against Arthur, and the reader is therefore left with the sense that she is the owl in the same way that Merlin was the robin. The parallel between the two symbols is quite clear; the robin, as the symbol of Christ, leads Arthur to do good, the owl, as symbol of the feminine supernatural, will lead Mordred to destroy the Kingdom of Logres.

Thus, while Margawse is Mordred's biological mother, Morgana is his spiritual mother, the cause of his birth and the influence on his character. Raised by Arthur, who is goodness personified in his role as anointed ruler of the Kingdom of God on Earth, it is reasonable to expect his influence to show in his infant son as he grows, but, to the contrary, it is made apparent by Morpurgo that character is part of nature, not nurture. The reader is told of this when Guinevere tells Arthur that the infant

Mordred 'is such a sad child, a strange child [...] The way he looks at me sometimes, he almost frightens me' (97). This assertion is not unique within the text, and Arthur himself relates to the unnamed boy protagonist, and therefore to the reader, that Mordred became 'ever more unlovable as the years passed' (127), and that his presence at Camelot 'was slowly becoming a blight on our lives' (99). Consequently, the reader is left with the impression of the fault of the maternal in the creation of the character of the child. This comparison with maternal and child morality, or amorality, is made more apparent with the arrival of Galahad, the child of Lancelot and Elaine, at Camelot.

Lancelot, the foster child of Nimue, the Lady of the Lake, arrives at court following another prophecy from Merlin, who, unlike in Malory's text, fails to warn Arthur of the danger that Lancelot will pose to the security of the realm. Instead Arthur meets Lancelot's arrival with joy, stating 'I was more and more alone – until the day Lancelot came to Camelot' (103). Arthur's Joy is soon undercut as it becomes apparent to the reader that Lancelot and Guinevere love each other, and this is again alluded to by foreshadowing which shapes the reader's perception before the events unfold; "'I think" said Guinevere, as she lay beside me, "I think perhaps he is a man you shouldn't like too much"' (109). This is soon made more apparent when Arthur witnesses Guinevere 'looking at Lancelot in open admiration' (111). Arthur is oblivious to what this reveals, and instead frames it as an extension of Malory's homosocial bonds as he states that this incident reflected 'the three of us in such harmony with each other, and with the world around us' (*ibid.*). Such a revelation seems to realign Morpurgo's text with the ideology of Malory, particularly when the adulterous relationship is revealed to the court by the spite of Mordred, at which point Gawain exclaims '[t]here are some things, Mordred, better left unsaid' (227). This would suggest a reproduction of Malory's view of adultery,¹⁶ whereby adultery itself has many positive benefits for the forging of bonds between the knights and the king. It is the revelation of the adultery, the dissemination of the information to the court as a whole, which causes the harm and the fall which is associated with the revelation of the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere.

¹⁶ As discussed in Chapter Two.

However, this view of the ideology emanating from Malory is problematized when Mordred's motivation for this revelation is considered.

In Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* Mordred and Agravaine conspire with others at the court to bring Arthur down in order to seize power for themselves. In Morpurgo's text, the reader can never forget that Mordred is inherently wicked, being the creation of Morgana La Fey, the spiritual mother whose amoral nature he has inherited. In comparison with Galahad, it becomes more apparent that the morality of the child stems from the mother, as both Lancelot and Arthur have erred, and yet found forgiveness, whereas Morgana and Elaine occupy opposing poles on the dichotomy of feminine representation.

While both mothers have children out of wedlock, it is clear that Elaine is a true lover, and would marry Lancelot if he were willing. Elaine is 'fair and kind and good, and she is everything a man could want in a woman' (121). Elaine also embodies the beneficial healing powers that women employ to aid the hero in his quest, appearing at times which are helpful to the male, as a form of the goddess healer who is a familiar trope in fantasy tales from the post-War years. Hourihan (1997: 156) argues that:

[b]ecause the story is always narrated from the hero's point of view women appear only insofar as they are involved in his adventures, and the effect is to suggest that women are of no significance except when they make an impact on men.

In terms of Morpurgo's Arthurian narrative it is possible to see this as a reproduction of the hero quest narrative as defined by Hourihan, particularly in relation to the gender stereotype which he reinscribes throughout this text. This is most apparent with Elaine, and her embodiment of the faithful and true love, who waits for Lancelot and dies of a broken heart when he finally returns to Camelot places her firmly in the realm of the 'good' woman, that creature desired most by men. While she is a mother, she is not, as the deviant mother of Mordred is, a sexually desirous woman. As Hourihan (*ibid.* 177) goes on to state, it is from Arthuriana:

and similar myths [that] the figure of the fatal woman in European culture took initial shape, but it was Christianity which provided the context for the

full flowering of the stereotype [in the figures of Eve, Delilah, and Salome] In all these instances it is the active sexuality of the women which makes them dangerous and establishes them as archetypes of evil' (*ibid.* 177).

Elaine thus embodies that female figure who in reality cannot be; the mother who is asexual.

It is therefore unsurprising, given the comparison already made with regard to Mordred and Tennyson's *Idylls*, that Elaine's child, Galahad, is the opposite of Mordred. In a lengthy comparison of the two, Arthur narrates:

Galahad was now the strongest of us all. He had taken Lancelot's place in the tournaments, as the great champion everyone wanted to beat, but could not [...] Trained in combat by his own father, Lancelot, and now stronger even than he, he was the joy of his father's life, the pride of his eye. Mordred too had become a fine warrior, but try as I did –and I did try – I could never bring myself to like him. Just to look on him would often make me shudder with shame [...] because I had to acknowledge that this excuse of a man was indeed my own flesh and blood. Had he not been my son I would have long since banished him from Camelot. (187).

Such a view of the two boys, when taken in conjunction with what the reader already knows of their parentage, leads to the supposition that Morpurgo here is drawing on the later ideology of Tennyson rather than that of Malory. Consequently the reader is left with the impression that Morpurgo is concerned with the same issues as Tennyson, issues not present in Malory, of the maternal influence in the next generation, a concern which effectively removes blame for shameful behaviour from the father, and therefore lays blame for the failure of the empire on the shoulders of the womenfolk.

The significance of the morality of the children, as descended from the maternal line, is made more apparent when examined in terms of the inter-relationship between gender and nation. As already discussed, Lancelot iterates the importance of teaching the children (110-111), but this has already been stressed by Merlin, when on his departure he instructs Arthur to 'fight the long fight to expunge evil from this land and make it at last a fit place for your children' (79). This fit place is the Kingdom of Logres, a place which appears throughout the history of the Arthuriad as England under the rule of Arthur. As Ganim (1996: 152) discusses, from the end of the nineteenth century 'Medievalism was propounded as an

ideology, with a specific religious, political and cultural agenda'. Therefore in employing this strategy in regard to Arthur, Morpurgo can be seen to be allying himself more closely with the intertextual ideology of Tennyson than with his supposed primary inter-text. Nira Yuval-Davis' discussion on gender and nation (1997) is particularly useful when discussing the motherhood narrative and the placement of women within the nationalist ideology of Morpurgo.¹⁷

While women are often marginalised from discourses surrounding 'nation' Morpurgo acknowledges that '[a]s the biological "producers" of children/people, women are also, therefore, bearers of the collective' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 26), women must be included within this discussion. In a worrying extension of this ideology, Morpurgo utilizes his discourse to dictate who the desirable reproducers are, following Tennyson's model, and consequently his ideological stance with regard to gender and nation becomes dangerously close to the ideological underpinnings of eugenics. Eugenics is often associated with the physical control over the reproductive rights of certain members of society, particularly with those who possess traits deemed undesirable by the majority populace. As Yuval-Davis (1997: 31) goes on to argue '[e]ugenics [...] did not concern itself with better nurturing of children, but attempted to predetermine the quality of the nation via "nurture" in the way of selective breeding'. A consequence then of the way in which the morality of the children, and their subsequent character development, is presented in Morpurgo's narrative is the suggestion that this model of collective continuance is still desirable, and that morally ambiguous women should be prevented from breeding through the actions of their male counterparts. Such a notion in a children's text is worrisome, as it exists not only as part of the explicit ideology, but runs throughout the narrative as part of the implicit ideology which Morpurgo reproduces from Tennyson's Victorian model.

As with all other areas of a text, it is not possible to determine whether or not this ideology will be adopted by a particular reader, and as Yuval-Davis (1997: 4) suggests in relation to nationalist ideologies 'even the most hegemonic naturalized

¹⁷ This theme is introduced on pp9-10.

grand narrative in historical societies have never had homogenous unified control over the differentially positioned members of those societies'. Thus even the placement of this ideology within a narrative which makes explicit the notion of nationalism through uniting the common origin ideology with that of an idealised past cannot control the reader response, but when taken in conjunction with the age of the implied reader of this text, and their placement in the concrete operational phase of thought process suggests that more readers of this text will align themselves with the ideology, subsuming the self into the narrative, than will produce a subversive reading.

4.8 Conclusion

As a result of this discussion it could be argued that the reason Morpurgo's text, although widely read by actual children, has been ignored by critics and scholars is because it conforms to the dominant ideological paradigm of the West. It reinforces ideas regarding the subordinate place of women through their omission, fore-judgement, and their dubious place in the continuance of nationalist aims and objectives. In so doing, it also marginalizes the implied male reader, situating him in a social discourse in which his future path is limited if he is to be part of the society desired by this text. As Pinsent (1997: 163) suggests:

[w]hat is needed is a change in the expectations of those who are too easily satisfied by subordinate positions, and this will be helped by books as well as legislation. Putting yourself imaginatively into a position is one way of affecting your ideas about your future.

Morpurgo's didacticism leaves little room for readers to place themselves imaginatively into an alternate lived experience, and consequently he limits the possibility for the shift Pinsent finds so necessary. It would seem that books which allow this imaginative leap should come from an alternative ideological stance than the one offered by Morpurgo, and this alternative stance can arguably be found in Mary Hoffman's *Women of Camelot*.

5. Pseudo-feminist Revision and the Psychology of Myth: Mary Hoffman's *Women of Camelot: Queens and Enchantresses at the Court of King Arthur*

5.1 Introduction

Mary Hoffman, like Morpurgo, is a prolific writer of children's literature, perhaps best known for her *Amazing Grace* series of picture books for the younger child reader. Like many other authors working in the current children's literature market, Hoffman has written an Arthurian text. Unlike Morpurgo, and many other authors who favour the historicist genre, Hoffman, as the title of her work suggests, has foregrounded the role of the women in the narrative. Despite this difference in apparent perspective, an exploration of the scholarly material reveals that a similar picture of criticism emerges. Yarrow (2004) is the only academic to offer a critical examination of this text, and she finds it to be a favourable challenge to the patriarchal ideology which usually permeates Arthuriana. However, an inclusion of the work of academics who focus on children's literature, such as Stephens and McCallum (1998), Hunt (2001) and Pinsent (1997), all of whom are discussed in greater detail in previous chapters, reveals that this may not be entirely accurate. This theoretical stance is supported by the work of Wareing (1994), who explores transitivity analysis, and allows a close reading of the agency of the women within the text. Önal (2011) contributes to this chapter's discussion of the construction of female identity through the use of her detailed exploration of the motherhood narrative, which allows an understanding of the textual mother within a feminist framework. This is used in conjunction with the work of Lehr (2001), whose discourse into the features expected in feminist children's literature and as such offers an insight and allows an exploration of their presence, or lack, within any work claiming to be a feminist retelling.

While Morpurgo mimics Green and continues 'the sense of nationalism that permeates his work' (Yarrow, 2004: 133) and consequently favours a view of public

life which ostracizes the feminine, Hoffman overtly shifts the focus to the private.¹ Writing in the late twentieth century for a female readership, Hoffman's contribution to children's Arthurian fiction ostensibly writes against the dominant ideology of the genre. This is a somewhat complex picture though, as the message she conveys appears to run counter to the overt message of the publisher's rhetoric, and it becomes instead a text which appears to suggest girls should welcome the opportunity to be passive and beautiful, rather than active and in possession of a rounded and dynamic personality. This is particularly apparent when explored in the context of Hunt's work on the peritextual elements of children's fiction and the specific impact they have on the child reader as a result of Western educational practices. This is particularly problematic given Hoffman's background as both a writing of teaching materials for BBC school's programmes and as an award winning children's author. In addition to this, her background in linguistics, which she taught at university level, suggests that she should be aware of the power of linguistic choices to undermine the explicit ideology. However, this does not appear to permeate her choices in terms of structure and language within this text.

This is particularly apparent when the 'blurb', a key feature of the peritext, is examined. Hunt (1991) argues that the peritext is highly influential to the approach of the child reader. The publisher's 'blurb' reads:

Morgan le Fay, Igrayne, Lyonet, Nimue, Lyonet [sic] and Ragnell – these are the women who drive the legends of King Arthur and Camelot through love, hate, enchantment and tragedy. One by one, their voices come swirling out of the mists of time in Mary Hoffman's powerful retelling, based on Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. (2000)

The 'blurb' serves as an introduction to the text before the text itself is encountered by the reader. It encourages gatekeepers to purchase the book for the child reader, and child readers to commence the reading process. As such its importance should not be overlooked, particularly with reference to the impact of genre as a signpost to the approach desired by the reader.²

¹ See pp.69-71 for a discussion on Green.

² See the Introduction, pp.10-12 for a discussion of the impact of genre.

The reference within the 'blurb' to Malory's text makes overt the intertextual debt being claimed by Hoffman's narrative, lending it the authority desired by the author of historicist narratives, yet it also suggests a feminist retelling. Its feminist credentials are made more overt by other aspects of the peritext, including the accolade from *The Sunday Times* which immediately follows the blurb: 'Each story reveals a feisty heroine'. Hoffman's general introduction to the text highlights this still further:

[b]ut these weren't just stay-at-homes. They were influential queens and powerful sorceresses, and even the ordinary women were determined and resourceful. In spite of the restrictions of their lives, the women often lie at the heart of the stories, and, by one means or another, they make things happen...(2000: 8).

Such an introduction to the text is problematic. In the first instance it castigates the stay-at-home woman, the mother and homemaker, removing choice from the female reader and potentially casting doubt over the legitimacy of their primary role model, if this is a mother who has made the choice to stay at home. In the second instance it creates an ethos of feminism which readers may expect to continue throughout the narrative. This would appear to be a positive stance as it subverts many of the developments in Arthuriana in post-War Britain. During this period many fantasy narratives aligned themselves with an allegorical history in order to frame their ideology. In so doing they frequently portrayed racist, nationalist and sexist agendas, and may therefore either alienate potential readers, or invite the reader to become complicit in their own subjugation (Hourihan, 1997). In an overt reversal of this there is the implication of a text which allows girls to read themselves into Arthuriana without the process of subjugation. However, the implicit ideology of a text can undercut authorial intention, creating a tension which lulls the reader into a false sense of the feminist, creating an implicit reader position of 'less-than' the male counterpart.

Not all critics have identified this as a site for concern though, and Yarrow (2004: 134) argues that previous texts have focussed on:

[t]he private sphere [which] is defined by silence, by its absence from the narrative. The basic values as they are presented in the text [...] all align to support the separate gender roles of masculine and feminine [...] New Arthurian retellings are emerging which are clearly set in both the public and the private spheres, the social world of the court and the intimate world

of the individual's personal life. The focus of these works is at once the empowerment and the disempowerment of women.

Yarrow (*ibid.*) goes on to state that this latter view is apparent in Hoffman's text, and the shift in focus to the female, with the opportunities both presented to her and removed from her by the patriarchal society which she inhabits, is a positive step forwards. Consequently, the depictions of rape, violence towards women, and the containment of their lives are utilised to enhance the child reader's awareness of these issues, not to perpetuate sexist and regressive images. This reading of Hoffman's narrative provides the opportunity for the text to be viewed, as the blurb suggests, as a feminist revision of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*.

5.2 Feminist Children's Literature

The primary centre for debate regarding the depiction of female characters in children's texts is that of their silencing. Pinsent (1997: 77) argues that she 'would claim that books which omit females or only portray them in subservient or limited roles can be disempowering to female readers and are likely simply to confirm the unconscious prejudice of the male reader'. Pinsent continues, arguing that a reversal of the depiction of weak or subjected women often results in strong female characters becoming pseudo- or surrogate males. This can be seen partially in Reeve's *Here Lies Arthur*.³ The female protagonist Gwyna escapes the constraints of a childhood as a girl but only through discarding her femininity. She cannot, and does not, attempt to redefine the female role, but finds freedom through embodying masculinity until such time as she can no longer 'pass' as male. One of the reasons for this could be the impact of the protagonist on the reluctant male reader. This focus has developed as a result of Western educational policies which focuses on the reluctance of the male reader, and his alleged reluctance to read anything ostensibly aimed at girls (Lehr, 2001). This is problematic, as it results in the female reader subjugating her identity and selfhood in order to adopt the male subject position, as in Morpurgo's text. Hoffman's narrative attempts to reverse this as it very obviously envisions a female implied reader, as evidenced by its overt focus on the female voice, its title and its cover illustration (see Appendix E). While the

³ See pp.80-82 for a discussion of Reeve's handling of gender.

age of the implied reader is harder to define than in many other children's texts, as there is no protagonist or focalizer upon which to base such assumptions, the content and writing style would suggest one similar to that of Morpurgo's text, with the reader being at the concrete-operational stage. As such, it is necessary to further examine the scholarly literature which attempts to position the female reader in the text and view how representations of gender affect their reading experience, and thus move away from the phallogentric view adopted in traditional pedagogic literature. Shoemaker (1998: 1) explains that:

[g]ender as a category of historical analysis first appeared in the writings of American feminists in the 1970s [...] But what does the term mean? [...] the term's most powerful use is as an *alternative* to sex as a way of characterising the differences between men and women in history [...] the term 'gender' is used to make the point that dissimilarities between the sexes are socially, culturally, and politically constructed, and are therefore subject to change (*italics in the original*).

Consequently it is reasonable to expect that feminist revisions of texts written after this period will focus on the issue of gender as one of performativity (Butler, 1990) and to therefore depict female subjectivity in more varied way, even in historicist texts such as Hoffman's.

Stephens and McCallum (1998: 144) discuss this with relation to Arthurian fiction for adults, arguing that there is 'an aspect of Arthurian retellings quite prominent in popular adult medievalism but generally absent from versions for children, namely, recasting of stories to present female perspectives and to express a sense of female power'. Hoffman certainly presents female perspectives in her narrative, but the nature of such an overt intertextuality as is claimed by the author and publishers problematizes this, not only because the social and cultural context of the original writing differs from the context of the contemporaneous author, but due to ideological and intertextual interference from the sheer volume of children's Arthuriana, such as Morpurgo's, which claims Malorian source material for nationalist and retro-sexist didacticism. While Stephens and McCallum (*ibid.*) claim that any retelling will likely reproduce the anti-feminism of the inter-text, Lehr (2001: 15) also rejects the notion of intertextual feminism, sating '[f]eminist children's novels reject the notion that heterosexual relationships are more important and supersede friendships and bonds between women. These

relationships include mother-daughter relationships, intergenerational relationships, friendships between women, lesbian relationships and surrogate sister relationships'. Consequently it is reasonable to expect Hoffman's retelling to not only foreground the female voice, but to do so in a way that highlights these important female relationships, with a reduced focus on heteronormative male-female bonds traditionally found in Arthuriana.⁴ This presents problems when examining the text in terms of how gender is inflected by genre.

5.3 Genre

Treharne and Walker (2002: 2) argue that 'gender is always already inflected by literary genre', and in terms of historical texts this has often been manifested in the silencing of the female voice in favour of the more politically relevant, public, male voice. This is partly because in the creation of historical novels, research is required to compensate for the under-documentation of women's lives. This is particularly problematic when viewed with reference to the historical romance, a category in which the majority of Arthuriana is placed. This can be seen when one considers that this is an ostensibly female genre in which the women depicted are passive or silent.⁵ As Gossman (1990: 23) argues, this is because:

the material best suited to the epic writer is that which has already been selected, filtered, and shaped by literary tradition and popular imagination, and which the epic writer in turn filters with his own audience in view; and preferably such material should be regarded by the public as generally "true".

Arthurian literature is often framed as epic romance, and therefore has the weight of authority, a shaping by literary tradition, and acts as a shorthand for the popular imagination. To lend it that sense of 'truth' which the reader desires, it frequently focuses on the public life of the male, as the details of male lives can be more easily verified.

⁴ This can be dated to approximately the mid eleventh century when Wace translated Geoffrey's text into Anglo-Norman. While this was ostensibly a translation, not a retelling, it has subtle differences to Geoffrey text, and quickly becomes the basis for a great French flowering of Arthuriana.

⁵ As discussed in Chapter Four.

However, as already mentioned above, Hoffman's overt aim is to overturn this tradition and to foreground the usually silenced female perspective. Ganim (1996: 160) suggests that 'the resurgence of interest in myth and anthropological interpretation in the post-World War II period was tied to a sanitization of the entire enterprise, freeing myth and ritual criticism from its heavily politicized context'. While many critics of post-War literature, particularly fantasy and Arthurian literature, may find such a statement contentious, it is possible to argue that in the much more recent past, commencing, arguably, with Marion Zimmer Bradley's 1983 text *The Mists of Avalon*, adult literature of the genre has started to reimagine the past with a focus on the female. Ganim (*ibid*: 163) goes on to state that:

the effort of the past few years has been to demedievalize medieval romances. In so doing, its agenda is also to replace a static and romanticized conception of the medieval past with one which is more complex and striated. Such an effort involves the demythologization, even the deromanticization of romance.

It is possible then to approach Hoffman's (2000) *Women of Camelot* in this vein, and to view it not as an anomalous children's text, but rather one which continues the work of adult writers of Arthuriana for a children's audience, and in so doing removes it from the metanarratives of both history and romance to foreground the female voice, and, as Yarrow (2004) suggests, uses this frame of reference to empower the female reader. In order to explore the textual connotations of such an interpretation, it is necessary to view it not only in terms of its alleged primary inter-text, Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, but also in the light of Tennyson's much more recent *Idylls of the King*.

5.4 The intertextual relationship between Hoffman, Malory and Tennyson

As discussed with relation to Morpurgo and his claim that Malory is the primary inter-text on which he based his work, the ideological relationship between text and inter-text is rarely straightforward. Each text is produced in a specific cultural context, with a set of social dynamics informing not only the reading of a text but also its interpretation in intertextual reworkings. Consequently it was shown that Morpurgo used Malory's words, but in framing them in alternative contexts he gave a different ideological impetus to those words, one more in keeping with a post-

War view of nation and a post-Victorian ideology regarding gender. Therefore, in interpreting Hoffman's text, in spite of the publisher's claims it is beneficial to pay more attention to the way in which Tennyson's *Idylls* have impacted on the structure and format of the intertextuality found in *Women of Camelot*. This is interesting as although the blurb relating to Hoffman's text claims a monologic intertextual relationship with Malory's work, in the parallel framing of it as a feminist retelling we may expect to see a greater degree of interrogative intertextuality, and thus one which reproduces the source material less faithfully in order to present the female voice and subjectivity more clearly than any of the canonical authors have done.

5.4.1 *The sexualised female*

The framing of these tales, as discussed above, would suggest that in telling the women's stories Hoffman has sought to redress a power imbalance inherent in the hero narrative, but this is not quite so easily reconciled when the novel's view of the female body is examined, particularly as it seems to foreground the sexualised nature of femininity, and to emphasise a woman's role as an object of the male gaze. It is perhaps most beneficial to begin this analysis with an exploration of the first woman of Camelot, Arthur's mother, Igrayne. While the primary focus with regard to Igrayne will be the circumstances surrounding Arthur's conception, it is interesting to note that the first words written in the main body of Hoffman's retelling focus not on the disturbance Igrayne feels at the lechery of Uther, as they are in Malory, when, given the first spoken words of the text she announces to her husband, Gorlois: 'I suppose that we were sente for that I shold be dishonoured; wherfor, husband, I counceille youw that we departe from hens soddenly, that we maye ryde all nyghte unto oure owne castell' (3).⁶ Such an introduction to Igrayne certainly frames her as the desired object of the male gaze, but she does not receive this passively. She rejects Uther's gaze and asserts her own subject-hood above this, and is at the same time framed as having power to persuade and instruct her husband in such matters. While this is subverted slightly in Hoffman, when Gorlois informs Igrayne 'I cannot risk offending him by leaving without a reason' (14) perhaps the

⁶ Translation: 'I suppose that we were sent for so that I should be dishonoured (seduced). Therefore, husband, I advise that we depart for here immediately and ride all night to the safety of our own castle'.

most significant alteration is the foregrounding of the female desire for the male gaze, and the importance of the sexually desirable body.

The opening line of Hoffman's text reads 'I never thought of myself as beautiful' (9). The remainder of the first paragraph, some eight lines, is given over to a discussion of how she neglected her looks in her youth. This could perhaps be read as a liberation from the formative control over women's bodies which begins in contemporary society from the earliest age (Walter, 2010). However, its foregrounding as the first utterances of the text places an importance on the external trappings of femininity which paradoxically undercuts any rejection of the idealised female body. This is reinforced when the second paragraph states:

[b]ut those wild days came to an end when my mother told me that I was nearly a woman, and must learn to sit still, to smile and to sing. My father said I would never get a husband by running in the woods, and gave me a harp and a tapestry frame (9).

This statement combines with the introductory paragraph to highlight the importance not only of the adoption of heteronormative models of gendered behaviour, but also to iterate the importance of making the female form a desirous object of the male gaze, as the primary function of a woman's life is to secure a husband. In this scene Hoffman appears to be stressing the importance of gender performativity, as traditional female traits must be 'learned'. As such, the authorial voice is distanced from that of the patriarchal characters, and while the focus of the tales is to reinforce heteronormativity, there is a subtlety in the tone of this scene which posits an alternative view. Lehr (2001: 1) argues that 'by the age of eight many boys and girls already identify passivity and waiting for the prince as the girl's ultimate role'. If this is interpreted in conjunction with Lehr's earlier statement regarding feminist books being those which see female relationships as more important than heteronormative models, then it becomes apparent on the first page of Hoffman's text that classifying this as a feminist, or female focussed retelling, is problematic, as the inexperienced reader may conflate the authorial voice with the explicit ideology of the patriarchal characters which more closely reflects the reader's lived experience.

Wareing (1994: 129) argues that:

scenes in fiction are often focalized through one of the characters present, and the character's vision of events is therefore privileged over that of other characters [...] By focalizing the scene through the male's experience, the female is inevitably represented as the object of the male gaze.

While it is undeniable that Hoffman has provided female focalizers for her text, which according to Wareing's theory of the male gaze should mitigate this effect, through removing the sense of subject-hood Igrayne's actions and words provide in Malory, and instead making her more of a passive instrument in male power play, she is forced to become complicit in her own objectification. Consequently the implied reader is also encouraged to accept this position and thus the female focussed retelling reinforces the stance of the hero narrative by way of its implicit ideological function. This results in a narrative which foregrounds the objectification of the female body, and nowhere is this more apparent than in Arthur's conception.

In both Hoffman and Malory the form of Arthur's conception is the same; Uther, magically transformed by Merlin to look like Gorlois, appears in Igrayne's chamber where she willingly sleeps with a man she believes to be her husband. She conceives Arthur and later learns that Gorlois had predeceased this event. On the revelation that Uther is the father of her unborn child, a fact revealed after their marriage, Malory recounts that '[t]henne the Quene made grete joye whan she knewe who was the fader of her child' (6).⁷ By contrast, in Hoffman's text Igrayne states '[o]nly once did I repent my decision [to marry Uther], and that was the night Uther told me he was the father of my growing child' (15). This suggests anger at the deception Uther has perpetrated upon Igrayne, but it does not identify the conception of Arthur as the result of an act of rape. This may not be surprising in Malory's text, since during the time of writing rape was seen as a theft of the female from her rightful male spouse and due to Gorlois predeceasing the act then this would not be relevant. Despite the historical view, a story that arises from, and speaks to, contemporary culture could be expected to explore the consequences of this to be more fully. Rather than focussing on the implications of this rape for the female protagonist of the story, Hoffman instead relates it to the impact on the male

⁷ Translation: 'Then the queen was very happy for she knew who the father of her child was'.

child, who is rejected by his mother as a result of his parentage.⁸ Instead of recounting an act which must have had a profound emotional effect on Igrayne, Hoffman relates how she saw her marriage to Uther as ‘my punishment and my penance’ (15). This punishment seems to be as a result of her status as a desirable female, and consequently Hoffman frames the situation so that the deaths of the men in battle are Igrayne’s fault. As Neale (1980: 61) argues ‘it could well be maintained that it is a woman’s sexuality, that which renders them desirable – but also threatening – to men, which constitutes the real problem [...] and which constitutes also and ultimately that which is really monstrous’. The discussion of the monstrous feminine will be continued in depth in Chapter Seven, but in relation to Hoffman’s narrative it highlights the difficulty of reading her text as a feminist retelling. The female object of the male gaze appears to be left no recourse but to adopt the position of desirable female, as Hoffman removes her subjectivity. As a result of this she is forced to be made abject, and consequently to be viewed as monstrous or an aberration by the very society which gave rise to her role as unwilling subject of male power. This sense of the sexualisation of women is continued when the character of Guinevere is examined.

Two stories in the collection focus on Guinevere’s life; ‘Queen of the Round Table’ and ‘The Queen’s Knight: Guinevere’s Love for Lancelot’. The latter documents the consequences of Lancelot and Guinevere’s adulterous relationship, and much like Malory, Hoffman goes to great lengths to defend the actions of the lovers. In so doing, Hoffman rejects Tennyson’s influence, and rather accedes to Malory’s rather more French romance vision of a flawed King Arthur, and a justified love between Guinevere and Lancelot. Hoffman’s Guinevere states ‘most people blame Lancelot and me for everything that happened. They have no idea what it was like to be married to the greatest and most ruthless king who ever lived’ (55). She also foregrounds Guinevere’s ‘sorrow’ (15) and therefore casts a shadow over her marriage, asserting Guinevere and Lancelot’s right to a personal happiness which extends beyond their public responsibilities. This is undercut somewhat as a

⁸ This will be discussed in more detail with relation to Hoffman’s retelling on the motherhood narrative.

feminist revision when she lays the blame for this unhappiness not with Arthur but primarily with Morgan La Fey.

Neither Malory nor Tennyson include Morgan at this point in the narrative, so the fact that Guinevere 'couldn't forgive him [Arthur] for the secret things Morgan had told me' (55) undercuts Lehr's evaluation that the most important element in a feminist narrative should be female bonds. It allows for Morgan to be a dangerous and malevolent presence, much as she has been since the fourteenth century, and consequently the actions of the dangerous female have more culpability than the actions of the flawed men. This is made more apparent when Hoffman gives over two paragraphs of this tale to documenting Morgan's attempts to undermine Arthur's rule, to kill him, and to place her own progeny, Mordred, on the throne (56). Many postfeminist critics see actions by sexual and strong women as positive portrayals, and viewed through this lens Guinevere is excused for her sexual adultery. This view rejects much of the conservative ideology of Tennyson, which has had such an impact on post-War Arthuriana, but it reads a greater degree of malevolence into the women than Malory's narrative. In Malory's text, Guinevere and Lancelot are forgiven because of their true love for one another, while Hoffman prefers a defence which castigates Morgan for her involvement in the fall of Camelot. The tale 'Queen of the Round Table' does little to redress this balance, foregrounding from the first the sexual obligation of matrimony.

Guinevere tells the reader that 'I overheard the young lord speaking to Leodegrance about marrying me [...] he looked straight towards me and smiled, a smile that caused my hands to falter and wine to spill on my white gown. It looked like a bloodstain' (18). This guilty admission interweaves images of marriage, virginal purity and the obligation to bring sexual innocence to the marital bed. This introduction to Guinevere returns to the themes of Igrayne's story, and the importance of the female to embody purity. Much like Igrayne's narrative, Guinevere's tale also highlights the inactivity, the passivity, of the women, which belies the claims made for the book. While Igrayne's counsel is ignored by Gorlois, removing the power Malory affords her, Guinevere's tale reverts to the later medieval and Victorian models of rule. While it was noted that Geoffrey leaves

Mordred *and* Guinevere in charge of the kingdom in Arthur's absence, no subsequent author has awarded such power to Guinevere. It would therefore have been interesting to see Hoffman revert to this earlier model, but instead she casts Guinevere as something of a petulant romantic.

Her tale begins with the line '[t]here is nothing so boring as a siege!' (17) and continues to state 'I thought my first and last act as warrior princess would be to surrender the castle' (17). This mention of Guinevere as a warrior princess is notable, as it allows the possibility for Hoffman to continue this theme, and to reclaim Guinevere from her usual heteronormative gender role, and to reimagine the gender binary. Unfortunately this fails to transpire, and instead Guinevere and the castle are saved by the arrival of a stranger, perpetuating the view of women as damsels in distress, in need of saving by the heroism of the males who perform their role in accordance with normative gender expectations. This incident compounds the impression of the opening line, and ensures that the reader sees Guinevere as a deferential romantic heroine, when she utters 'I had no doubt that he was a great man, for all that his clothes were torn and dusty' (17). If, as suggested by Ganim (1996) in the introduction of this chapter, the demythologization of Arthurian tales begins with their deromanticization, then it becomes problematic to view Hoffman's interpretation as part of this process, and thus as part of the re-visioning of gender and national ideologies. This is particularly difficult to envision when 'Castle Adventurous: Elaine's Story' is examined.

Here Hoffman follows Malory's model and her source is quite obvious. In fact, in places it is almost word for word from Malory. For instance, they both describe Elaine as 'naked as a nedyll' (463) (49). However, while in Malory she is simply removed from the water and clothed, in Hoffman's text Elaine, Eve-like, finds her nudity 'shameful' (49) and says 'I was blushing, as any maiden might, and hoped that it might be put down to shame at my nakedness' (51). Hoffman also has Lancelot blushing, while Malory merely states 'and whan sche was arayed, Sir Launcelot thought she was the fayryst lady that ever he saw' (463).⁹ So Hoffman

⁹ Translation: 'When she was dressed, Sir Lancelot thought she was the fairest lady he had ever seen'.

introduces both the notion of shame and sexuality to the source text, again returning to the active male gaze and female passivity. Although Hoffman also introduces the notion of Lancelot blushing and thus undercuts some of the metanarrative of chivalry in the process, this reinforces rather than mitigates the sexual nature of that gaze. Rather than averting his eyes from the naked Elaine, he appears instead to focus his attention, and his blushes, on the object he sees, emphasizing sexual desirability as an essential element of the damsel in distress.

While Elaine and Lancelot do later sleep together and conceive a child in both texts, Hoffman's construction of this scene does little to reimagine her source in a feminist light. In subverting the source material the surface ideology of the tales suggests the desire to construct a strong female voice and feminist rewriting. However, the content of this tale indicates that she has actually taken male words and put them in women's mouths, creating a pseudo-feminism which has little if anything to do with feminist revisions of patriarchal texts. Rather Hoffman's explicit ideology has been undercut by the unconscious assumptions that are revealed in the implicit layers of ideology, and this could be argued to be a case of Freudian extended parapraxis.¹⁰

Further support for this theory can be found in the story of Nimue. A minor character in Malory, the entirety of her relationship with Merlin can be found on just two pages, where the reader is informed; 'And allwayes he lay aboute to have hir maydynhode, and she was ever passynge wery of hym and wolde have bene delyverde of hym, for she was aferde of hym cause he was a devyls son' (p.79) and for this reason she secures him in a stone.¹¹ Known as Nyneve in Malory, she becomes Vivien in Tennyson and takes on a far more sinister aspect, in which she, not Merlin, is the sexual aggressor. Here Tennyson states:

And lissome Vivien, holding by his heel
Writhed towards him, slided up his knee and sat,
Behind his ankle twinned her hollow feet
Together, curved an arm about his neck,
Clung like a snake (ll. 234-240)

¹⁰ This will be discussed on pp.137-138.

¹¹ Translation: 'And always he was around her, trying to take her virginity. She was tired of him and would have been free of him, but she was afraid, because he was the son of a devil'.

And so the serpent-like Vivien seduces the elderly Merlin to extract information, gain knowledge and use this to lock him in a hawthorn tree and perpetuate the downfall of the great patriarchal civilization that is Camelot. It is notable that in her attempt to tell the stories of the women of Camelot within a feminist framework Hoffman has chosen to base her tale on Tennyson's arguably far more anti-feminist narrative. While Malory provides context and reason for Nimue's imprisonment of Merlin, Tennyson constructs her as a woman who attained the knowledge she desired and incarcerated Merlin, reflecting Victorian fears over female education. Hoffman mitigates this to some extent through the ending of her text, in which she has Nimue express her sorrow stating '[i]t has been a heavy burden. All I seek now is peace' (29). While this may induce the reader to be sympathetic to Nimue's position, Hoffman's textual references to the serpent (e.g. 29), intertextual interference with regard to Tennyson's text, and the biblical connotations of such imagery, make it hard to view this tale as anything other than a reworking of the patriarchal narrative of the Fall ostensibly told with a female voice. This sense is continued when Hoffman's portrayal of the motherhood narrative is explored.

5.4.2 The Motherhood Narrative

The motherhood narrative appears in many of Hoffman's tales. One interesting aspect of this in Hoffman's interpretation is the appearance of the step-mother in the tale of 'The Loathly Lady: Dame Ragnell's Story' which does not appear in either Malory or Tennyson's Arthurian works, but instead seems to be taken from an anonymous fifteenth century poem 'The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell' and Chaucer's fourteenth century 'The Wife of Bath's Tale'. Characteristically depicted in the typical accoutrements of such a role, the stepmother's beauty and long black hair may seem like precursors to the wicked queen known primarily through her appearance in adaptations of fairy tales, notably 'Snow White', particularly given that Ragnell herself is fair and beautiful. It is the step-mother's jealousy of Ragnell which causes her to curse her to be loathly until such a time as she can find a man who will love her despite her outward appearance. The inclusion of this tale, which, according to Stephens and McCallum (1998: 150) 'may be so endemically antifeminist that no retelling can really overcome this', is worth considering. If it is included as part of a female focussed reclamation of

Arthurian tales then it is to be applauded. However, both the frame narrative, focussing as it does on female beauty and the worthiness of the woman to receive the male gaze, and the inclusion of the step-mother, are problematic to this interpretation.

‘The Loathly Lady: Ragnell’s story’ is one of the less well known tales of the *Arthuriad*, and it tells the story of Dame Ragnell and her Brother Sir Grummer Summer Jours. Deprived of their lands and inheritance through the connivance of their wicked step-mother, who is ‘fine-boned and graceful, with long black hair’ (41), and also a witch, her final act of spite towards her step-children is to take away Ragnell’s beauty, uttering the words ‘[m]ay you stay as loathly as you are now, by day or by night, until you meet a man willing to let you make your own choice’ (42). Sir Grummer confronts Arthur and challenges him to answer the question ‘[w]hat do women most desire?’ (44). Arthur has one year to provide the answer or return all Sir Grummer’s lands. Ragnell herself contracts Gawain to answer the question, an answer she will provide if he agrees to marry her. This duly occurs, they kiss, she becomes beautiful and the spell is broken. There are some fairly obvious fairy-tale motifs that occur in this tale, which will be discussed later, but first it is necessary to turn to the answer to Sir Grummer’s question.

In both Chaucer and the anonymous fifteenth century poem the answer given is:

We desyren of men above alle maner thyng
To have the sovereynté, withoute lesyng,
Of alle, bothe hyghe and lowe. (Chaucer, ll. 422 -424).

Hoffman relaxes this message into one which reads ‘it must be that women desire their own way, to have a choice about what they do and not have it decided for them’ (46) whereas in the source texts Ragnell is liberated from her curse of ugliness through dominion over Gawain, this antagonistic stance which so often causes misattributed anger towards feminism is mitigated through the picture of liberation through a marriage of equality and choice. Such an image of marriage can only be considered positive and in keeping with a feminist rewriting of source texts which have been described as pervasively anti-feminist (Stephens and McCallum, 1998).

Neither of the source texts gives a reason for Ragnell's ugliness. The insertion of the step-mother as the cause of Sir Grummer and Ragnell's misery appears to be an invention by Hoffman. The ideas associated with the step-mother, and the anti-motherhood narrative, came to prevalence in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, when 'the presence of the wicked step-mother [...] reflect[ed] an anxiety about expanding economic opportunities for women' in the West (Breuer, 2009: 11). While this is one interpretation of the fear of the step-mother, her inclusion in popular tales could also reflect the very real fear of maternal mortality. It is also possible to read the step-mother as an enactment of the fears of women with regard to their own economic opportunities, and the societal pressures they face to be both a legitimate wife and mother. However, neither of these more proto-feminist readings alters the construction of the second wife as monstrous anti-mother and witch, reflecting concerns about subversions of societal norms. As Önal (2011: 87) argues '[t]he motherhood narrative differentiates between mothers and other women in a way that legitimate mothers are valorised and put in a position not only as different from, but also as superior to, other women'. Therefore the step-mother is doubly 'othered' and her eventual demise contains a didactic message which reinforces the normative, or patriarchal, social role of woman as wife and biological mother.

In addition to the complicated images of matrimony and maternity offered in this tale, the story of Dame Ragnell further replicates a traditional view of society, as it reinscribes the typical beauty and beast story. While Ragnell on the surface appears to celebrate the achievement of equality in marriage, the central quest of the tale reinforces, through a more covert ideology, the notion of masculine supremacy as it:

has sometimes been said that the fascination of this question, and the wish to solve the enigma of Woman that it conveys, express interests that are typically male (or, in more abstract, cultural terms, masculine). In the case of *Ragnelle*, the narrative unfolds in ways that have the heroine clearly serve the interests of the male chivalric society that the poem good-humouredly celebrates (Hahn, 1995).

Told through Ragnell's eyes, the structure of the story and emotions underlying it remain the same as those of the medieval texts which Hoffman has used as her source. Consequently the end result is one whereby 'everyone [is] established in

her or his proper place, and with courtesy restoring the Round Table's customary mutuality and hierarchy' (*ibid*, 1995). As such the tale reinscribes notions of feminine beauty and acceptable behaviour. If this is the case in the tale of Dame Ragnell, and the depiction of the step-mother, then what of the representation of the motherhood narrative in the other tales?

Guinevere's story explores themes with which most readers will be unfamiliar, primarily that of Guinevere and Arthur's infertility. In male-centred tales the failure of the royal pair to produce a legitimate heir gets scant attention. Ignored completely by Hoffman's primary source, it is addressed by Tennyson.¹² It is therefore possible to argue that the foregrounding of issues of maternity is a feminist reworking of this particular tale, but such a reading is not unproblematic. It is possible to see the reassertion of this potent symbol of feminine power as a subversion of '[p]atriarchal culture [which] has made having a baby for many women synonymous with inferiority, restriction and exclusion' (Minsky, 1996: 55). However, Hoffman chooses not to depict motherhood as a source of power. While it is problematic, within the framework of the *Arthuriad*, to give Guinevere a child and as such reclaim the motherhood narrative from the hero quest narrative, Cooper manages to incorporate this within her retelling, although to a limited extent. Consequently, by showing Morgana 'admiring her little boy playing at our feet' (21) Hoffman presents the reader with an image of femininity that both breaks the bounds of the traditional Arthurian stories, and yet continues to depict Guinevere as lacking. Obscuring women from view and removing the mother from the tale has become a central motif of mythology. Encoded within Guinevere's story is arguably the same morality of the patriarchal texts, such as Malory and Tennyson, and this continues when Hoffman discusses Guinevere's maternity, or lack thereof.

Contrasted with Morgana's happy motherhood, Guinevere recounts that she had 'just lost my first child at a very early stage and was feeling sad and bitterly disappointed' (20). Despite the grief that usually goes along with miscarriage, the sadness of this is bypassed as status and outward display are everything: 'queens do not weep' (20). This should make the reader question how much of a feminist

¹² See pp.57-58 for a discussion of Tennyson's depiction of the motherhood narrative.

retelling this is, foregrounding as it does the patriarchal constructs of the Victorian period above the emotional reality of the woman whose voice the reader is supposedly hearing. What is perhaps greater cause for concern here is the desire for a male child. Morgana has a son, Arthur has a son, and Guinevere's 'empty womb ached for a boy of my own' (21). The knowledge that Arthur has sired a child on his own sister, married Guinevere to get the round table, and ordered the mass slaughter of every male child born on May Day as a result of the prophecy regarding his own son, pales into insignificance for Guinevere compared with the knowledge that her childlessness must be her fault, as it cannot be Arthur's. The cause of her despair is not in looking at the face of a new and childless reality for herself, but in the knowledge that she has failed her husband: 'it was my fault he had not yet had an heir by me' (23). The childlessness then is less significant than the lack of a male heir and the foregrounding of the desire for a boy coincides with psychoanalytic theory which argues that having a baby, especially a male baby 'blunts some women's unconscious sense of lack and injustice and makes them feel [...] like "real" human beings and the equals of men' (Minsky, 1996: 55). This suggests a psychoanalytic reason for a woman's need to produce a male child, but this may also be the result of societal pressures, particularly as primogeniture only values the male heir. While this has lessened within modern society, the continued influence of primogeniture may affect the way female readers view their own identity, and potential future maternity. As such Hoffman's insistence on the supremacy of the male child doubly reinforces the message to the female reader that they are constructed as lacking, as 'other', and that masculinity is the desirable norm. The view of the desirability of the male child pervading Guinevere's tale is reinforced through its appearance in the motherhood narrative as depicted in Igrayne's story.

Hoffman's retelling of Igrayne's story reiterates the ideology of the supremacy of the male child, when it states that "let Cornwall have a duchess!" he'd say. "Morgause is a good enough heir for me." But I wanted to give him a son' (11). It is necessary, as previously discussed, to ascertain whether this emphasis is reflective of the authorial voice or of the patriarchal society the author is replicating. This cannot be easily determined, nonetheless, it is striking that, unlike the performativity of gender, which seems to be emphasising a contradiction between

the authorial voice and the patriarchal attitude, the view of the importance of the male child permeates the text with no obvious contradiction. This also supports Minsky's assertion that the desire for a male child is the result of a woman's assimilation into, or imprisonment within, patriarchal social order, as here it is Igrayne, not Gorlois, whose desire for a male heir is the cause for discontent. Gorlois is an anomalous male in that he values the strength of his daughter, a contradiction as he overrides his wife's desire to leave Uther's court. Such a small gesture on the part of an arch-patriarch goes some way to mitigating the anti-feminist narrative of Tennyson's text in particular, but it does not in itself help to cultivate a feminist revision. In fact Gorlois' position as an outsider, as a Cornishman not an Englishman, gives him the place of foreign 'other', and consequently he is only tangentially a representative of the established patriarchal and social order of Camelot, which is held up as a paragon of gendered behaviour on which readers should model their behaviour. This will be more significant when discussing the implication of gender and national ideologies later in the chapter, but before moving on to this discussion, it is worth noting the way in which Hoffman relates Igrayne's loss of Arthur.

Malory makes no mention of Igrayne's response to the loss of her child, stating only '[s]o like as Merlyn devysed it was done' (6).¹³ This is perhaps not surprising, as it has been noted that Malory focuses only on characters in so far as they drive the plot forward (McCarthy, 1988). Igrayne then exists for Malory as a means to Arthur's conception, an essential element of the plot and no more, so her feelings on the removal of her child are not important. Tennyson gives no voice to Igrayne, the result not only of his overall framework regarding the mistrustful nature of women, but perhaps more in line with his removal of any element of the supernatural from his tale, knowing that his audience would not respond to this. As Culler (1977: 225) explains 'one would not have thought it possible, but Tennyson has written an entire poem on King Arthur and his Knights without one single instance of magic or the supernatural offered on the poet's own authority'. Although Ygerne is mentioned only as a long monologue, which borders on gossip, to assure

¹³ Translation: 'It was done as Merlin had planned'.

Leodegrance of Arthur's suitability to marry Guinevere, Tennyson affords her more realistic emotions on marrying Uther, who has not been magically transformed but rather laid siege to Tintagel.¹⁴ Tennyson states:

So, compass'd by the power of the King,
Enforced she was to wed him in her tears,
And with a shameful swiftness (ll.202-204: 26).

Given that Tennyson, in allowing this insight into Ygerne's emotions at the time of her marriage makes this more real than either Hoffman or Malory do, it is notable that he, like Malory, gives Ygerne no voice at the time of Arthur's adoption by Sir Ector.¹⁵

Hoffman does give Igrayne a voice in relation to her son's enforced adoption, with her stating 'I had no desire to hold him or nurse him. I turned aside as Uther gave the child, all swaddled up to Merlin' (15). This is followed by the culmination of Igrayne's story, which amounts to just two paragraphs to sum up the remainder of her life, and in which she has nothing more to say of her son, except 'you must hear of him from others...' (15). Such a perspective on Igrayne is hard to reconcile with an attempt at a feminist reworking, as her story is, much as in the texts of Malory and Tennyson, only important in so far as she relates to the birth of the hero. She is not worthy in and of herself of continued attention, and no creative licence has been employed on the part of Hoffman to create a valuable life for Igrayne beyond this function. In addition to this, her refusal of the maternal role is not connected to the rape conception, since, as previously discussed, this is not alluded to in the text, but rather seems to be a continuation of her self-imposed, and somewhat inexplicable, punishment for the death of Gorlois. The refusal to acknowledge the child, and more particularly to nurse him, not only ensures that Arthur remains more the child of Uther than of his mother, and thus the child of patriarchy, it also places Igrayne in the territory of the anti-mother.

¹⁴ Ygerene is Tennyson's spelling of Igrayne.

¹⁵ It is also notable that Tennyson mentions shame in conjunction with Ygerne and Hoffman chooses to extend this in relation to Elaine, as discussed on p.122.

While postfeminist theory embraces the right of the woman to refuse motherhood, Önal (2011: 87) describes the motherhood narrative as ‘a universal fiction which represents motherhood as an unequivocal goal for women’ in which:

the motherhood narrative comes to be associated only with pregnancy, labour and childcare through the conciliation of female sexual activity. Thus, motherhood becomes the sole – asexual – site of female activity [...] Once female sexuality remains under control and the motherhood narrative takes place within a framework of legitimacy, men do not play any major part in this narrative at all.

Igrayne’s role in the legitimate site of the motherhood narrative is problematic anyway, due to her lack of awareness over the paternity of her child. This uncertainty places her sexual activity outside of the control of patriarchy, and arguably beyond the control of men, even though Uther has the knowledge that she lacks. It is notable that this is the perspective adopted within Hoffman’s narrative, despite the fact that Igrayne has been duped by Uther, and thus she is depicted as rejecting her asexual role, and the legitimacy of her maternity. As she refuses the role of nurturer as well, she becomes not the mother but the anti-mother, as ‘[w]ithin a discourse which defines women only in their relation to men – as daughters, wives and mothers – the female evil simply connotes “other” women, who escape this bind and thus, evade societal control mechanisms’ (*ibid*: 88). It is therefore possible to read Igrayne’s punishment not as the result of the death of Gorlois but for her refusal to accept the role of mother and thus to be under patriarchal control. She becomes an embodiment of the ‘female evil’, an unassimilated ‘other’, who becomes the mechanism by which men avoid responsibility for their own actions and for the faults in society. Consequently Hoffman’s narrative of a female retelling of the Arthuriad commences with a tale which perpetuates the sexist ideologies of the Victorian era without the mitigation afforded to women in the earlier medieval texts. This view is continued with regard to another aspect of the peritext; the images which accompany the text.

5.4.3 Peritext

Peter Hunt (1991: 4) defines peritext as ‘the written (and graphic) material which “surrounds” the story; the publisher’s ‘blurb’, the typeface, the layout, for example. For real readers, all this makes a difference’. While this poses the question of what

Hunt means by 'real readers' it is plausible that such peritextual signposts may be more influential on inexperienced, or readerly, readers. Thus far this chapter has discussed the peritextual elements of Hoffman's *Women of Camelot* only in relation to the textual elements which support the explicit ideology of the narrative. As the exploration of the text so far has revealed this is largely undercut by the content of the stories of the female protagonists, it is pertinent to look at the source of the implicit ideology, including the images which accompany the text. As Hunt argues, such images, being more present to actual child readers than the blurb would be, are likely to have a significant impact on the way in which they approach the text.

The images provided by Christina Balit are all of a specific style, which, for the artistically aware adult reader, are reminiscent of the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The Pre-Raphaelites were a group of artists including William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who formed the movement in 1848. With the express aim of reinvigorating and recreating a form of art which, in their opinion, was lost with the advent of Classicism, associated with Raphael, they sought to depict a spiritual truth in their art. In creating this imagery, they sought inspiration from the medieval period, drawing on the Arthurian legends, the Apocrypha and other well-known medieval tales. Their rationale for this was the belief that the medieval period represented a culture whose spiritual purity and creative integrity had been eroded by the Industrial Age. Such a belief and use of medieval imagery places the Pre-Raphaelites firmly within the mainstream movement of the Victorian era which saw a rise in a cult of Medievalism, spearheaded by the royal family's use of King Arthur and King Alfred in the creation of their own public personae.

The use of medievalism as employed by the Pre-Raphaelites and Tennyson has a similar function to medievalism as it is employed today, as it serves to draw comparisons between contemporary society and a bygone age, usually in order to make an unfavourable comment on the current state of society. In using images reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelites' art works, this Victorian medievalism becomes part of the intertextual fabric of Hoffman's narrative, and perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in the use of an image of Guinevere, which is strikingly similar to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting 'Lady Lilith' (see appendices F.i and F.ii).

While it must be acknowledged that the child reader is unlikely to recognize the similarity between these two images, in terms of exploring the implicit ideology which gatekeepers unthinkingly reproduce as part of children's indoctrination into our culture, the use of Lilith as a basis for the image is significant. This is relevant when viewed in the context of the textual depiction of the motherhood narrative as Lilith appears in the Apocrypha as Adam's first wife. She is cast out of the Garden of Eden as she tells Adam 'I will not lie beneath you' (Cantor 1998: 19). Önal (2011: 95) explains that Lilith then 'pronounced the ineffable name of God (Yhwh), became a she-devil and acquired wings'. She thus becomes the precursor to the anti-mother, and this is particularly relevant when viewed not only in light of Hoffman's text, but also with regard to Morpurgo's use of the screech-owl as symbolic of the witch.¹⁶ This comparison arises as Önal (*ibid*) goes on to state that '[t]he Hebrew name Lilith, which appears in the Bible; in Isaiah 34:14 of the Old Testament (Black Koltuv 1986: 11), is translated as the "screech-owl" or "night monster"'. Hoffman's choice of this imagery within her text lends itself to the conclusion that, despite some textual evidence to suggest an attempt at reworking the patriarchal metanarrative endemic in Arthurian fiction in the Victorian period and beyond, the implicit ideology of the text and these peritextual elements combine into an anti-feminist rhetoric. The image of Guinevere, the sexually erring woman who is barren, leads to comparisons to the way in which Önal (*ibid*: 96) describes the figure of the anti-mother descending from Lilith, as 'Lilith also managed to prevent the birth of children by causing barrenness, miscarriage, or complications during childbirth'. Therefore Hoffman's textual and peritextual representations of a symbolic analogy between Igrayne, Guinevere and Lilith, the anti-mother suggests that at best this female focussed reworking is pseudo-feminism. It is therefore worth exploring whether the image of gender as it relates to nation manages to achieve a genuine re-vision which the view of gender alone has not.

5.5 Gender and Nation

By examining nationalist ideology in Hoffman through the images of the motherhood narrative, it is possible to see a continuation of the trend discussed in

¹⁶ Morpurgo also uses this image. See pp. 103: 105 for an exploration of this.

relation to Tennyson and Morpurgo's texts in the previous chapter. While not concerned with a didacticism as to who should reproduce, as the aforementioned authors are, Hoffman still places a preference on the female obligation to produce male children. When this is viewed in light of nation and gender, it becomes apparent that rather than reviewing these ideologies by foregrounding the importance of the mother-child bond and the influence this has in shaping national destiny and the collective (Yuval-Davis, 1997), Hoffman instead highlights the role of women as mere receptacles for the continuation of patrilineage. The male fear of woman is the fear of the 'open container', the woman who refuses his ownership. While Morpurgo and Tennyson use this fear to focus on the negative impact of the maternal power on national stability, Hoffman takes an alternative view. As Irigaray (1991: 36) explains 'the role of the maternal-feminine power is often nullified'. In removing the child from the mother, and in displaying the mother as rejecting the child, Hoffman effectively nullifies the power of the mother. While it is possible to read this as a rejection of the notion that biology is destiny for women, the removal of the maternal ensures that the children, most notably Arthur, are the children of patriarchy and thus of nationalist ideologies and the maintenance of sameness. Consequently, the absence of the mother reinforces Jung's argument that the hero is he who is twice removed from the maternal. The one notable exception to the display of maternal power of the mother-child bond is demonstrated when Igrayne speaks of Morgana.

Igrayne appears to have more control over the fate of her female children, a curious paradox which further cements the gender binary in both social and maternal paradigms. While this is interesting for this reason alone, it is what she has to say of Morgana that is most significant. She states that Uther 'agreed to my request that Morgan should be a holy sister' (15). Through Igrayne's influence in this area it becomes apparent that Morgana's latent malice is given a vent. Through her unmarried state she is given the opportunity to learn, and as Morgana states '[t]he convent to me meant one thing – learning' and '[i]t seemed to me that if I were to defeat Arthur, I must learn everything Merlin had to teach' (37). From these examples it is possible to interpret Hoffman's view of the convent education Morgana received as one which allowed her to extend her malevolent power and to

do this for the sole purpose of disrupting the patriarchal social order which Merlin and Arthur represent. This connects Hoffman's intertextual ideology to the anti-feminist narrative of Tennyson, and particularly to his view of Vivien,¹⁷ which Tennyson used as a vehicle to express his concerns regarding the education of women. Therefore Hoffman perpetuates the ideas expressed in Victorian Arthuriana that the educated woman poses a threat to national stability. This is reinforced, when, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, in the story 'The Queen's Knight' the reader learns of the harmful influence Morgana has had not only on the stability of Guinevere and Arthur's marriage, but as a direct result of this her culpability in the fall of that emblem of patriarchy, the Kingdom of Camelot. This view of the nunnery as a site for mistrust is also made more apparent in 'The Queen's Knight' and creates a potentially powerful intertextual resonance.

Despite having long ago taken holy orders in what can be interpreted as a move towards Guinevere's redemption, she states 'I am intent on saving my own soul' (67), but that Lancelot 'is beautiful, even now, at the time I write, when we live chastely in separate religious houses. I know if my nuns here at Amesbury had a visit from Lancelot, they would soon forget their vows!' (55). This statement casts doubt over Guinevere's repentance of her 'sin', continuing the sense that Tennyson creates that her act of joining a convent may be one of self-preservation rather than of repentance. While Tennyson emphasises Guinevere's 'humiliation in sin' (Knight, 1983: 165), this does not extend to a sense of genuine repentance. While the situation of Guinevere within a convent comes from the source materials, this is historically the result of the conquest as in 'the turmoil of the Conquest years a number of Anglo-Saxon women had evidently been committed to convents for safety, an eleventh century form of evacuation' (Leyser, 1995: 72). This view of convents did not continue, and by the Victorian era the cultural view of convents and nuns had shifted to the point that they were no longer viewed as a source of safety for women in times of civil conflict, but rather as a site for women to escape patriarchal control. The mistrust of the feminised space of the convent could be argued to stem from the notion that this is a liminal space, and as such an alternative

¹⁷ See pp.53-54.

source of power. Much like the bedroom, and the wilderness, the convent is a place where authority is denied to the male. The convent consequently has the potential to disrupt the powerbase of the court, and to forge a new hierarchy. Barczewski (2000: 185) notes that in Victorian England there were 'widespread concerns that convents led to the disruption of family ties by removing women from their proper roles as mothers and helpmates to men'. This sense was added to by the fear of Popishness which connects the notions of nation and Christian values in keeping with Tennyson's view that 'national equals Christian equals human equals universal' (Sinfield, 1986: 160). This mistrust of the women who remove themselves from the consigned social role of wife and mother, and therefore from the patriarchal system, is underlined but not necessarily condoned in Hoffman's narrative.

Guinevere alludes to the notion that the nuns are not as pure and holy as the reader might expect, but sexually lustful in a manner which is threatening. While this chapter has looked at the view of the sexually desirable woman, this focuses rather more on the disruptive power of the sexually desirous woman. As Ussher (1989: 14) explains, this relates to the notion of female self-subjugation and the male gaze, as:

[w]omen cannot escape from the dichotomy of being surveyed, of being labelled and categorized, yet of simultaneously surveying ourselves, of placing ourselves in the scheme of things [...] the pure, virginal 'good' woman on her pedestal, unspoiled by sex or sin: her counterpart, the whore, is consumed by desires of the flesh, is dangerous and inherently bad, tempting man from higher pursuits.

Therefore in constructing even nuns as sexually lustful, Hoffman recreates, perhaps inadvertently, Tennyson's view that all women are 'pure' only when they submit to patriarchal control. As a result, it is reasonable to read Hoffman's portrayal of gender as one which critiques the way in which women were categorised by their placement in the patriarchal dichotomy of female representation, and thus seen as a threat to national stability.

Yarrow (2004: 134) argues that this is a partial view of the depiction of nation and gender offered by Hoffman, as 'it is not the plot changes *per se* which are of the most significance, but instead the dramatic change in the perception of actions in

the public sphere'. She goes on to suggest that this occurs in Hoffman's narrative because:

[t]he private sphere and its inhabitants are neither silent nor hidden in these texts [...] with respect to women's access to justice and protection; however the point in these works is not the rectification of lack of access, but instead that position [of] women as powerless is highlighted through rape and abductions. (*ibid*: 138)

The shift of focus from the public sphere, from which women have traditionally been excluded, to the private sphere in which men's public image is affected by their private actions, is a significant alteration. However, through Hoffman's use of intertextuality which often reiterates men's words and contextualises them in a retro-sexist way, the changes which Yarrow finds in Hoffman's text are problematic. Not least of these is the foregrounding of rape and adultery, which have been explored above and found to be lacking in the critical treatment the reader may expect to find in a feminist retelling. Perhaps the most problematic element of this view though is that in not foregrounding issues of female disempowerment but rather focussing on sexualisation and the perceived importance of the male heir, Hoffman's explicit ideological intention is undercut. A familiarity with the text's core motifs and its binary depiction of gendered identities results in the implicit ideology of the text and peritext undermining any attempts to redress the nationalist ideology which reinscribes the view that '[w]omen's oppression is endemic and integral to social relations with regard to the distribution of power and material resources in the society' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 7). This continuity arises for a specific set of reasons which extend beyond the culture and contemporaneous social circumstances which give rise to the texts under discussion.

5.6 Conclusion

Part of the difficulty of rewriting the Arthurian stories for a new generation of children, stories free from the patriarchal and nationalist ideologies which have characterised the literature since the post-War period, is not only that 'the continuum of idealised "feminine" and "masculine" personalities, sexuality and roles are enshrined in Arthurian literature for children' (Yarrow, 2004: 134), it is also the result of an internalisation of the symbols and motifs of myths which are fundamental to a nation's creation of tradition. If a text which overtly claims to alter

this idealised representation is undermined by its author's implicit ideology, recreating the unconscious assumptions which lead to retro-sexism, then it is prudent to ask whether these tales can be rewritten to create an image of gender and nation which is more in line with equality than those already discussed.

One area in which this may be possible is in an alternative genre as 'genre is, in effect, a *restrictive* model of intertextuality' (Duff, 2000: 17, italics in the original). In choosing to recreate the Arthurian tales in historicist terms, both Morpurgo and Hoffman have, despite different authorial intentions, perpetuated the ideologies of previous generations of Arthurian works. If genre can restrict intertextuality then it may also undermine authorial intent. To explore this issue further, this thesis will now look at a fantasy retelling; Diana Wynne Jones' *Hexwood*.

6. Liminal spaces, Kristevan Timelines, and Interrogative Intertextuality in Diana Wynne Jones' *Hexwood*

6.1 Introduction

Diana Wynne Jones' career as an author of children's fantasy fiction spanned forty years, during which time she wrote forty-eight books for children and young adults. *Hexwood*, a somewhat oblique Arthurian retelling, was written in 1993, approximately half way through her career. Jones employs Arthurian motifs firmly in keeping with medievalism, but does so in an innovative way which subverts many of the typical tropes. This is possible because she utilizes the fantasy genre which gives authors a freedom from tradition which has not been found to be present in the historicist novels. Of course, to some extent all Arthurian fiction is fantasy, as it relies heavily on the supernatural; however, Jones employs specific elements of the fantasy genre.¹ This arguably allows her to liberate the Arthurian material from its regressive historicist origins and to provide a progressive view of women and nation. This chapter will discuss the efficacy of this model in offering an alternative view of the 'other' through the exploration of the use of genre to recreate these ideologies through the use of liminal spaces, the implementation of non-linear timelines, and a more knowing interrogative model of intertextuality than those evidenced in both Morpurgo and Hoffman's texts.

Unlike Morpurgo and Hoffman, Jones's work has received an increasing amount of critical attention in recent years. While much of this focuses on her more well-known texts, *Hexwood* features in several scholarly works, most notably those of Ang (2010) and Mendlesohn (2005). While Ang discusses the character progression and the challenge Jones offers to the more typical mythical form, Mendlesohn argues that the complex time structure of the novel has a direct impact on the way in which the reader is invited to encounter and interpret the text. Both these works

¹ These will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

have influenced the direction of this chapter, leading to a discussion of the feminine and the dispossessed within a traditional myth, and the interrogative intertextuality Jones employs, which calls into question many of the taken-for-granted ‘truths’ of earlier, more regressive Arthurian works. Significantly, Mendlesohn’s argument that fantasy and science fiction possess progressive and liberating qualities of stands in contrast to the work of Tallis (1988), who argues that the genre restricts the readers possible interpretations of the material, and Hunt (2001) who posits that fantasy is inherently regressive. In addition to this scholarly attention *Hexwood*, like many of Jones’ other texts, received good reviews from critics with Kirkus Reviews stating the text is ‘an elaborate, fascinating and superbly crafted adventure’ and The Washington Post that it is ‘[a]n intricate mesh of romance, science fiction, mythology and rite of passage’ (Cecile, 2007: 28). If the quality of the writing results in there being ‘no danger of slipping down the gap between the story and the teller’ (Carey, 1999: 32) then this critical reception is integral to an understanding of the effective delivery of the ideology to the child reader.² This then poses the question of why the text failed to achieve the popularity such a well-written novel should have received, and one explanation for this arises from the fact that it is so unusual to interrogate source material as Jones does. Stephens and McCallum (1998: 127) argue that:

[t]here is a thriving industry in adult fantasy which uses [Arthurian] material for quite diverse purposes, and another in children’s literature which overlaps with the former but also has its own distinctive attributes, shaped by the familiar metanarratives of retold stories.

They continue by stating that fantasy retellings for children are ‘a relatively minor domain’ (*ibid*) as children’s Arthuriana is dominated by historicist, Malorian retellings. As the last chapter concluded, there is a need for alternative literary forms to reimagine the mythical material inscribed in Arthuriana, and as such it is necessary to explore the few children’s texts which continue the adult tradition of offering an alterity of ideology in regard to gender and, as an extension of this, an alternative view of nation. This chapter will argue that Jones has rejected the

² This is discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

historicist genre as limiting the author to show what society should be like, instead embracing the innovative fantasy genre to reveal what society *could* be like.

6.2 Fantasy Fiction

Fantasy fiction is distinct as a genre as it allows both authors and readers ‘to consider imaginatively things that cannot be’ (Hunt, 2001: 2), while science fiction (SF) is better described as the logical extension of technology to imagine a world that might be, it is possible to read both genres in *Hexwood*. It is the Bannus, ‘constructed to ensure the choosing and the ruling of the Reigners would be absolutely fair and absolutely immutable’ (370) which is turned on by people with neither ‘the tools nor the training to get the thing off’ (11) with ‘a field like you won’t believe’ (12), which enables the action to unfold. Its use of portals and the medieval setting for the plot, as well as the use of the complex and interchangeable timelines,³ align this text more closely with the fantasy genre. While SF has a traditional male bias in terms of their readership and authors, this has shifted in recent years and it is estimated that 55% of readers are female. However, fantasy has always had an appeal for female readers and Jones’ text utilizes this, incorporating a female protagonist which, in line with the use of focalizers to determine implied readership, suggests that this is a text aimed at a female audience. In his discussion of the problems this traditional bias raises, Hunt (2001: 3) argues that ‘[t]here is, however, one area of formulaic writing that is increasingly difficult to justify: the treatment of gender [...] in fantasies [...] women are marginalized [...] or mothers [...] or dangerous’. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore whether this is always the case, or whether Jones has utilised the freedom offered by the genre to imagine an alternative perspective.

Not all critics agree with Hunt; both O’Keefe (2004) and Mendlesohn (2005) argue that fantasy can be liberating, and that writers such as Jones can subvert the usually regressive nature of fantasy and SF. They argue that she reclaims the excluded ‘other’ from the narrative, and this argument provides an interesting perspective on the ideologies of nation and gender. This ideological shift is particularly relevant when the text is examined in light of Ang’s (2010) argument that Jones’ ‘philosophy

³ Explored on pp.155-160.

as it relates to the writing of fantasy [is] that the "old things" of fantasy are not sacrosanct'. This is possible because, as Hunt (2001: 2) argues, 'one thing that can rarely be said of fantasy is that it has nothing to do with reality'. If it loses this base in reality then the text ceases to speak to the reader of the world, and of their place in society. Jones, like many other authors of fantasy and SF, uses the fantasy genre to explore the world not just as the readers know it but how they, if brave enough and free enough, might experience it. This is made more apparent by the obvious blurring of realist and fantasy genres in the opening chapters, where the reader experiences the Reignners' world in chapter one, the Wood as 'a beautiful wood, open and sunny' (20), in which 'we have come to the wrong time and we must try again' (23) in chapter two, and the realism of the Housing Estate in chapter three, where the reader encounters Ann, who, lying in bed ill (26), can see Hexwood Farm housing estate and Banner's Wood (25). The interchangeability of the apparent genres results from the playfulness of fantasy, the ability to use a base of reality to create a recognisably different social and cultural space, providing, as Mendlesohn (2005: p.xiv) explains 'a playground for thought-experiment'.

Stephens and McCallum (1998: 147-8) argue that 'sword-and-sorcery feminism has extensively transformed its medieval antecedents. In so doing, it carries out substantial cultural work over and above its capacity to entertain'. This argument is in keeping with the critics discussed above who argue that fantasy is a potentially liberating genre, and that the cultural work undertaken by such authors allows for the reimagining that has been absent in other Arthurian reworkings, despite the apparent fantasy base for the mythical speech they contain. However, in 1992 Stephens (9) argued that Jones, 'a very intelligent writer of absorbing fantasies, appears to have been consistently unaware for most of her career that her depiction of women already socialized into conventional female roles is pervasively sexist'. While this view problematizes somewhat the position of this thesis with regard to the text, it is possible that Jones, like other fantasy writers such as Ursula Le Guin, became more skilful at removing the unconscious assumptions which often arise in the form of implicit ideology. This is perhaps more notable with Jones' work as her career fell into two distinct periods and therefore there is a possibility that the ideological underpinnings of each period of publication differ. This shift in the work

of Jones and Le Guin suggests that writers of fantasy have become more knowing, but with this knowing storytelling it is possible to argue that fantasy has begun to impose 'a passivity on the reader: he either swallows what he is told or he is excluded from the story altogether' (Tallis, 1988: 192).

While the historicity of the previous texts has been discussed in this thesis with relation to the restrictive nature of genre, Tallis posits an interesting paradox which can be explored in relation to fantasy. A genre which liberates the author from the restrictions of the past could be supposed to do the same for the reader. If Tallis' assertion of the passivity of the reader of fantasy is correct, then Stephen's questioning of the representations found in Jones' earlier works takes on new significance, as if the same is found to be true of *Hexwood* then the ideology is likely, in keeping with theories of the generalised child reader, to be more readily received and thus to have a greater impact. Imposed reader passivity actively discourages subversive reading by hiding the regressive ideology in an explicitly subversive narrative.⁴ This relationship between the author and the reader exacerbates the tension that exists in children's literature with regard to the power imbalance which exists between the gatekeepers and the readers. This has been argued by some critics to be mitigated with the use of the fantasy genre as '[r]eaders of fantasy are notoriously uninterested in the adult-child divide' (Mendlesohn, 2005: xiii). Mendlesohn goes on to argue that Jones' fiction 'argues against any sort of special treatment for children's books', (*ibid*). This authorial and readerly stance argues against Tallis' position stated above, and suggests that a knowing readership is preferred. Such a reader position is supported by Hunt (2001: 7), who argues that:

[t]he assumption that [...] you may not need to know much about this world in order to read about an invented one overlooks the obvious fact that knowledge of this world is necessary to *invent* one. Fantasy is, because of its relationship to reality, very *knowing*: alternative worlds must *necessarily* be related to, and comment on, the real world (italics in the original).

One of the ways in which Jones comments on the real world, and the worlds which have influenced the creation of *Hexwood*, is through the use of intertextuality, the

⁴ The restriction of genre will be returned to in this chapter's discussion of the unreliable narrator.

place of which in this fantasy text is a great deal more interrogative and diverse than that in the historicist texts discussed in previous chapters.

6.3 Intertextuality

The texts which precede *Hexwood* in this thesis have built on each other, drawing on the material which has been most influential on the English canon, with the two contemporary children's texts which have been explored using Malory as their primary inter-text. The result of this has been evidenced throughout as a use of the precise words which characterise Malory's work, with an implicit relationship to his ideology, in order to comment on contemporary values. Jones' narrative works against the Malorian dominance in contemporary children's Arthuriana, and while it is evident that some episodes have influenced the plot structure and setting, the intertextuality she employs is more diverse than both Hoffman's and Morpurgo's. The most apparent use of Malorian intertextuality is the wood motif which Malory uses, following his sources, as the place of Lancelot's madness. Malory recounts that 'Sir Launcelot [...] ranne furth he knew nat whother, and was as wylde [woode] as ever was man; and so he ran two yere' (472).⁵ This is followed by an account of the adventures that befell Lancelot during his period of madness, when he 'ran his way into the foreyste' (483). It is in this space that Lancelot meets Elaine Corbin, with whom he fathers Galahad, the noblest knight of all, and the only knight pure enough to obtain the Holy Grail. In his series, White reproduces the madness of Lancelot, almost word for word, when he recounts that Lancelot 'gave a loud shriek, and then jumped out of the window' (428), followed by several references to the 'Wild Man' (i.e. 433, 436). While Malory has Lancelot healed by the ministration of the hermit (483), and the task assigned to him by King Pellas (*ibid*), White rejects this and instead has Lancelot healed by the sight of Elaine, who is already the mother of Galahad:

Elaine put her hand on his forehead and made him lie down.
'You came like a madman,' she said, 'and nobody knew who you were [...]' Lancelot turned his puzzled eyes on her, and smiled nervously.
'I have been making a fool of myself,' he said. (442)

⁵ Translation: 'Sir Lancelot ran forth to he knew not where, and he was as made= as a wild man; and so he was for two years'.

Jones extends the wood motif, as will be discussed more fully later in this chapter, to a liminal, or heterotopic space, in which reality bends according to the rules of these places, to be reimagined and recreated as a womb-like space for healing. Consequently Jones embraces the possibility of the wood for re-creation of the self, but rejects the image of heteronormative love in this instance, stating instead that the mad man rose like a ‘corpse’ (42) in front of the terrified child Ann, who, rather than being the source of healing affection ‘scrambled into a turn and ran’ (43).⁶ While this episode has overlaps with both Malory and White, it has elements which suggest a direct reference to the Talbot Shrewsbury manuscript (British Library Royal Manuscript 15 E VI), specifically the sixty-eight page folio of *Chanson d’Ogier*.⁷

This version of the *Chanson d’Ogier* was produced under the instruction of John Talbot as a wedding present for Margaret of Anjou on her marriage to Henry VI in 1445, when she was just fifteen. The manuscript gives a significant role to Morgan La Fey and her realm of Avalon, and this introduces an interesting dynamic to the tales, shifting the focus to the French court of Charlemagne, with only a brief reference to Arthur at the closing of the narrative when Arthur is said to be in Avalon. It is not, therefore, the presence of Arthur, or any of his knights, which links this text to the Arthurian tradition, but rather the presence of Morgan, who is depicted as the creator of kings and empires, as well as holding dominion over her own empire; the fairy-land of Avalon. The foregrounding of this female ruled kingdom in the *Chanson d’Ogier* lends a greater degree of proto-feminism to the French narrative, a not unusual trait as the French, and Scottish, tradition has a tendency to relegate Arthur from the ideal King found in Malory and interpreted by Tennyson, and rather depicts him as a weak and flawed ruler. This depiction attributed the blame for the demise of Camelot to Arthur’s ineffectual rule, and not to the actions of Guinevere, Morgan or Morgawse, and as such is more readily

⁶ The character list is complex in Hexwood, and so has been included in Appendix I.

⁷ I am indebted to Rebecca Lyons, University of York, for the information relating to the connection between this manuscript and liminal spaces, following her paper ‘Morgan's Avalon: The ‘Other’ empire of the *Chanson d’Ogier*’, given at LeedsIMC 2014. (University of Leeds, Gendering the Empire panel, 7th July 2014).

adopted into feminist ideology. However, the reason for this depiction is not one of redressing the gender imbalance, but more for political and nationalist ideologies, and used to reclaim the narrative from the Anglo-centric view portrayed in the English tradition.

It is therefore interesting to this reading of *Hexwood* to explore the use of this MS in the narrative, and to examine the way a source text such as the *Chanson d'Ogier* may have influenced the gender and nationalist ideologies that the text contains. The use of a text which was openly writing against the British tradition, and yet for an English queen, is significant as it disrupts the monologic view of intertextuality which Morpurgo tries to present, and which Hoffman falls into unwittingly. Rather it suggests the change of thetic position which Kristeva argues for,⁸ which embraces the dialogic nature of the intertextual material. Stephens (1992: 87-8) describes two dominant modes of intertextuality found in children's literature, stating that in the event of the explicit presence of a pre-text 'the "original" story may be naturalized within the idioms and cultural codes contemporary with the retelling [...] contemporary values and aspirations may be encoded through the remaking of old stories'. This model of intertextuality, combined with medievalism, has been demonstrated in the narratives of both Morpurgo and Hoffman. In using intertextual material they hold an unfavourable mirror up to contemporary social values, and they emphasise the psychological effect of myth by suggesting that a great golden age has been lost to which society should revert. Alternatively, children's authors may choose to use intertextuality in a more interrogative manner, whereby 'the retelling may be consciously played off against some common notion of the shape and content of an "original" text, and might hence assume that the audience is in a position to weigh one against the other' (*ibid*: 88). The latter model is a far more knowing form of intertextuality, suggesting that the implied reader will have a level of reading maturity which goes beyond that of the concrete operational stage at which both previous contemporary authors were writing.⁹ This is made more

⁸ Discussed on pp. 23: 97.

⁹ See pp.16-17 for a discussion on the child reader and reading ability.

apparent when referring to Jones' use of T. H. White's *Once and Future King* (1958).

As both Morpurgo and Hoffman made direct reference to Malory and Tennyson to either replicate or subvert those authors' ideology in keeping with their own didactic model, Jones does much the same with T. H. White. However, while White's text is a 'very regressive and conservative' fantasy (Hunt, 2001: 21), Jones does not reproduce his ideological stance, preferring instead to challenge the overt didacticism he employs. This is achieved through deliberate echoes of White's material, such as the opening of *Hexwood* when the reader is introduced to Hume as a boy who 'has no past and little sense of self. But he does have a future, and a future that has already happened' (Mendlesohn, 2005: 72). This is a deliberate subversion of White's title and sense of story which pervades and frames Jones' revision of the narrative as she questions throughout the morality of ordained Kingship. In terms of intertextuality, this interrogative intertextual stance encourages a questioning readership, and the creation of subversive readings, leaving a gap between authorial intention and reader response which is actively discouraged by other contemporary authors.

Morpurgo, in particular, actively promotes a monologic intertextual reading.¹⁰ However, Allen (2000: 27) discusses Bakhtin's theories in greater depth, outlining the fact that 'all utterances depend on or call to other utterances; no utterance itself is singular; all utterances are shot through with other, competing and conflicting voices'. These competing voices, the conflict endemic to all communication, which by its very nature involves more than one cultural and experiential process to create meaning, opens up the gap between author and reader mentioned above. Rather than restricting the intertextuality through overt didacticism, such as that found in Morpurgo's reiteration of the need for the child reader to 'believe' (14), Jones' use of diverse intertextual sources is interrogative, emphasising the heteroglossia of language and thus 'language's ability to contain within it many voices, one's own *and other voices*' (Allen, 2000: 29, italics in the original). This view of

¹⁰ As outlined on p.100.

intertextuality is not deceptively monologic, but rather openly dialogic, and as such can be viewed as threatening to hierarchical concepts of society (*ibid*: 30).

Julia Kristeva, who extended the work of Bakhtin in the 1970s and 80s with particular emphasis on the inter-relationship between intertextuality and the nature of language as a semiological system,¹¹ was the first person to label intertextuality as such. Her focus was on the:

three dimensions or coordinates of dialogue are writing subject, addressee and exterior texts. The word's status is thus defined *horizontally* [...] as well as *vertically* [...] The addressee, however, is included within a book's discursive universe only as a discourse itself. He thus fuses with this other discourse, this other book, in relation to which the writer has written his own text. (Kristeva, 1986: 36-7, italics in the original)

If this view is compared to the model of the reader and author of literature provided by Fairclough (see Appendix A), then it is possible to see intertextuality, or the 'exterior texts', as part of the process of the creation of meaning. By including fragments or references to other texts within a body of work, the authorial intention may be to privilege one meaning, or to open up a myriad of possible meanings, and readers must interpret this intention based on their own cultural experience. Such a view disrupts the monologic interpretation of intertextuality as one in which the meaning of the signifier and signified are stable and unchanging. This pseudo-stability, employed by Morpurgo, creates the sense of the metanarrative which poststructuralists, such as Kristeva, have argued against in the post-modern world. Rather Kristeva argues for a process of semi-analysis, the process of which results in a text's meaning being in a state of constant production.¹² Allen (2000: 34) argues that '[i]n such work, Kristeva implies, ideas are not presented as finished, consumable products, but are presented in such a way as to encourage readers themselves to step into the production of meaning'. Consequently the doubled use of fantasy, as an innovative genre, and interrogative intertextuality, allows the opening up of the traditionally regressive nature of children's fantasy, allowing Jones to continue the adult fantasy tradition of reimagining national and gender

¹¹ Barthes also refers to semiological systems in relation to the psychology of myth. This will be explored in the 'Psychology of Myth' section in this chapter. A model of Barthes' system can be seen in Appendix C.

¹² Semi-analysis is the process of the deconstruction and rebuilding of semiotic meaning as part of cultural progression in line with post-structural literary theories.

boundaries. One of the most notable ways in which Jones utilizes interrogative intertextuality and the tropes of the fantasy genre to reimagine these ideologies is through the use of liminal spaces.

6.4 Liminal spaces

Liminal and heterotopic spaces permeate Jones' text, the most significant of which is Banner's Wood which controls and contains much of the action. However, *Hexwood* begins in a more realist fashion, with an allusion, perceived only by the reader who has already experienced the text, to the mirror which the child Ann uses to view the world. It opens with numerous hints to the reader of the action to unfold, and the real story behind the housing estate and Banner's Wood, which are consolidated, in the knowingly playful fashion which characterises fantasy texts, with the use of the heterotopic mirror; '[a]ll you have to do is to put a mirror where you can see it from your bed, and turn it so it reflects the street and the farm' (28-29) to give Ann a 'perfect back-to-front view of the end of Wood Street and the decrepit black gate of Hexwood Farm' (29). Mirrors are, of course, a means of doubling; they allow us to see ourselves in a way that we could not otherwise, and yet they do not reflect ourselves as we are, or indeed as others perceive us. Foucault (1967) explains that:

between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface [...] it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am.

There are references within this quote which relate to the textual theme of returning to where the protagonists began, which will be revisited later in the chapter, but the notion of the mirror as a means for the construction of the self and the construction of places (both real and unreal) is of relevance to this reading of *Hexwood*.

Neither the world which Ann believes she inhabits, nor the real world she lives in as Vierran, can be described as utopias (although arguably the liminal space of the Wood does come close to this perfect state) but the heterotopic space of the mirror is still a place which exists out of space and time. It is a place of the neither here nor there, where the images are not as they seem, being that back-to-front view of the world which Jones describes. Seeing the world through this lens allows scope for an interpretation of what is witnessed. Ann cannot be seeing things as they are, because of the reversal effect of the mirror, but the intrinsic link between the mirror and the view of the self encourages reinvention, creative thought, and a system of viewing the world not as it is, but as an image of itself, and thus open to alternative interpretations. As Foucault (1967) argues, something unique occurs in this place between places:

[e]ither their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space [...] as still more illusory [...] Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation.

As fantasy texts are about creating illusions to reflect on real places and real time, this is an ideal device for Jones to employ for this purpose, but it remains to be determined whether this heterotopia is that of compensation rather than illusion. As alluded to in discussions of historicist texts, the use of history embedded in the naturally fantastical tales of Arthur offer compensation to the reader, depicting a world which is inherently better than our own as part of the regressive ideological function, whether explicit or implicit, of the narratives. It is therefore possible that Jones' use of the heterotopia as an overt system in her fantasy is a means of revealing the illusory and constructed nature of 'reality', and social and cultural 'truths'. The reader of *Hexwood* receives information early on which suggest that the world in the mirror is an illusory heterotopic space, as Ann relates '[t]his was not just a fever-dream she had imagined in the mirror' (40). The liminal continues beyond the mirror and is centred in the Wood. The reader's first introduction to the Wood comes as Ann ventures into the space herself, when having risen from her sick bed she ventures outside. The reader sees the Wood through Ann's eyes, being told that 'the wood had gone quite green while she had been in bed – in the curious way that woods do in early spring' (40). This constructs the image of wild spaces

as possessing a life of their own making, beyond the realms of human interference. This is a temporal as well as physical space due to these elements, making it akin to Foucault's description of the heterotopia, but also to liminal spaces, such as Avalon as it has existed in mythology since its inception.

Geoffrey mentions Morgan La Fey's role as the ruler of the fairy Isle of Avalon.¹³ Keightly (1870: 15) explains that stories of fairyland arise because:

[a]mong all nations the mixture of joy and pain, of exquisite delight and intense misery in the present state, has led the imagination to the conception of regions of unmixed bliss destined for the repose of the good after the toils of this life.

While Keightly's work has been built upon by subsequent scholars, he makes an interesting point about the breadth of fairylore, and particularly about its origins and ideological impetus. Several of these subsequent scholars are published together in a collection of essays edited by Peter Narváez (1991). A substantial number of the essays focus on the fairylore of different cultures, and many of these see a conflation of the ideas of religion and fairylore, (Ó Giolláin, 1991: 199). The association between religion and fairylore would suggest that Keightly makes a valid point when he argues for the reason people have created fairyland. Keightly goes on to argue that in the *Chanson d'Ogier* 'Mogue le Faye' is mistaken for the Virgin Mary, although Avalon is 'still on earth, and therefore its bliss was not unmixed' (*ibid*: 16). While such an assertion is not only contentious but unprovable, the representation of Morgan in the *Chanson* is notably different from that in the English works discussed so far.

In the Talbot Shrewsbury MS, Avalon appears fairly late on in the *Chanson d'Ogier*, at a point where Ogier has fulfilled all the requirements for the development of his knightly masculine identity. By the time Avalon comes into the text, Ogier has demonstrated his prowess in battle by defeating the Saracens much as Arthur defeats the Saxons, has been knighted by Charlemagne, married, and produced an heir. Ogier returns to Denmark and chooses an heir for his kingdom. Ogier soon feels a longing to return to Charlemagne's court and leaves for France in a boat accompanied by only one squire. While sailing back to France the boat

¹³ As explored on pp.37-38.

suddenly deviates from its course, and heads toward a black mountain in the sea. This is the island of Avalon. As in many Arthurian texts this Avalon must be reached through water, although its location is usually unspecific. Therefore Jones' possible use of the wood as an alternative Avalonian liminal space is unusual, but still plausible, as it is a space which is entered unwillingly, and, equally as important, a space from which exit is possible, although certain accomplishments must be achieved before this can occur. As with the Avalon of the *Chanson d'Ogier*, which exists as a liminal space of 'otherness', Jones' reader is afforded a view of what occurs inside Avalon. In the source text, this is a process in which Ogier must remove the accoutrements of masculinity and embrace the essentially feminine space of the liminal, and this argues for a possible feminist reimagining of Arthurian material.

Like the Avalon of the *Chanson d'Ogier*, Banner's Wood is not a place of unmixed bliss and exists as a place of confusion and suffering, as well as a place of recreation and healing. This is made apparent to the reader when Ann first enters the wood, where she not only encounters the ghastly and corpse-like figure of Mordion, but also asks '[d]id I go into the wood *twice* then?' (63, italics in the original). This forces Ann to question her perception of reality: '[t]hat much is real' (63), although it quickly becomes apparent that nothing is as it seems within the Wood. The reader is introduced to the Wood as a space that can be entered willingly but not left: 'Ann went back to the bed and waited. And waited. But she never saw the van come out' (30). Thus the Bannus field, which encompasses the Wood, is introduced as a space where time shares the elasticity associated with Avalon. As such it is felt to be a place that exists beyond space and time, yet still earth bound and in some sense knowable. The reader experiences the non-linear time through the eyes of Ann/Vierran, when she encounters Hume and Mordion in the wood and realises that '[i]t seemed as if some years had passed' (103) or Hume 'was quite small again, about ten years old' (182). The effect of this is to make apparent the cyclical structure which aligns the liminal to the natural space. As Kaum (2005: 151) argues, a return to where they started from is characteristic of the cyclical structure of the Adventure story, 'but the journey they went on does not return them unchanged; a progression towards greater maturity and self-assurance transcends their physical

return to the starting point' (*Ibid.*). The transformation that is undergone in the cyclical structure of the adventure is arguably heightened by liminal spaces' association with the feminine.

Liminal spaces are often associated with transgressive or supernatural behaviour that cannot be controlled by the patriarchy. They are frequently inhabited by non-human, and often female entities, and can involve crises of masculine identity for male characters. It is in the forest that Morgan and her fellow enchantresses, the four queens, appear in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, and it is the space where, as mentioned above, Lancelot goes mad and loses his masculine and knightly identity. In *Hexwood* the liminal space can again be seen as the feminine space of restoration. Given that the purpose of the Bannus field, and thus the heterotopic or liminal no-place that it creates is for 'the Bannus to appoint the new Reigners and name their correct order' (370), it is undoubtedly a place where the hierarchy of the former patriarchal rule of the old hand of Reigners is not only threatened but destroyed. It is also the space where the 'othered', the dispossessed, those whose stories are normally overlooked unless they advance the tale of the hero, can be reimagined and given new lives within the system which has ostracised them. This space is doubled, and thus 'other' in and of itself. It is both heterotopic, as the Bannus field creates an alternative reality, or a mirror to reality, in which the selection of the Reigners can unfold, and a liminal space as '[t]he Wood will not let us go! [...] The Wood has co-operated with the Bannus because it needs something for itself' (375). Therefore it is a doubly feminised space in which the metanarrative of patriarchy can be challenged through the events which unfold within it.

In light of this, it is worth returning once more to Foucault (1967: 330) and his discussion on heterotopias in which he argues:

[w]e are in the age of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, the near and the far, the side by side and the scattered [...] It might be said that certain ideological conflicts which underlie the controversies of our day take place between pious descendants of time and tenacious inhabitants of space.

The competing Bannus and Wood fields which are juxtaposed as the heterotopic and the liminal spaces of feminine identity, abutted against the patriarchal reality of the reader and the world of the Reigners in the text, and combine to create the

ideological conflict Foucault refers to. This embodies itself in the previous texts discussed as the continuation of temporal ideologies portrayed as medieval, transposed into the contemporary landscape. In juxtaposing the spatial and temporal in alternative modes, Jones allows for the creation of an alterity of meaning. If the space of Banner's Wood allows for a spatial reconsideration of the traditional ideologies of the Arthuriad, into a more female focussed narrative, the use of timelines further adds to the sense of a feminist reimagining.

6.5 Kristevan timelines

Stephens (1992) argues that children's fantasy fiction tends to be more regressive in style than fantasy fiction written for an adult audience. This has been shown to be true in Arthuriana, with the work of T.H. White (1958), Susan Cooper (1977) and Rosemary Sutcliffe (1979). In *Hexwood*, Jones arguably counters this, continuing the adult tradition and rejecting the conservative and regressive nature of the children's fantasy genre. This has been shown partially through the use of heterotopias and liminal spaces, which allow for a feminised space. She continues this trend through the use of temporal disturbances which not only complicate the narrative, suggesting that the text has an implied readership that is more knowing than those of the texts explored in previous chapters, but which also allows for a continuation of a feminist re-visioning of the medievalism typical of the Arthuriad. While atypical temporal spaces are not unusual in SF and fantasy texts, Jones uses this technique to further the narrative's interrogative and innovative reworkings. When this is viewed through the temporal fantasy framework outlined by Mendlesohn (2005), combined with that of Julia Kristeva (1986), this allows for a continuation of the reversal of stereotypical retro-sexist and nationalist ideologies which have become such a recognisable form of Arthurian fiction.

Mendlesohn (2005: 68) utilises two theories of time, drawing on the theory of physicist John Ellis McTaggart, which Jones uses in her text; A-series-relative time and B-series-absolute time. Each time line is distinct, and serves a unique textual function. A-series-relative time can be seen as 'a mode of time travel that is facilitated by language rather than visible machinery or the description of time travel' (*ibid*). This suggests that the distant past, recent past, immediate past and the

present have a relative relationship to each other and can be experienced textually as either consecutive or non-consecutive. These pockets of time are most clearly seen in *Hexwood* when Ann enters the Wood, and realises that time there does not function as the reader usually experiences it. Examples of this have been given earlier in the chapter, but there is one moment which gives the reader insight into why time occurs in this way: 'The Bannus tended to send Ann along at important moments' (179). Consequently Ann enters the world of the Wood, and the life of Mordion, Hume and Yam, when there is a specific function for her to perform, or event that needs witnessing. In constructing the A-series-relative time in this way, Mendlesohn (*ibid*: 71) argues that *Hexwood* is not only constructed around spatial heterotopias, as suggested in the exploration of the liminal spaces, but also temporal heterotopias. This suggests that this place is not only spatially beyond the realm of the patriarchy, or the dominant ruling hierarchy, but temporally outside of its control as well, allowing for the possibility of a doubly feminised space.

Contrary to this is juxtaposed the B-series-absolute time. This is time as it is experienced by Ann on the housing estate and by those inhabitants of the home world of the Reigns. It is time as the reader is used to experiencing it, following a logical sequence of past, present, future, which follow each other sequentially. This is used to indicate the time of the patriarchy, as it is the time of the world outside the feminised space of the wood, and the Bannus field (see Appendix H). Each of these time lines has a distinct narratorial voice, and imparts a different sense to the reader of the reliability, and truth, of the events that are experienced in each space. The Reigns' world is characterised by the use of a third person narrative and 'its demotic voice encourages the reader to understand it as non-fantastical and hence somehow more true' (Mendlesohn, 2005: 75). This is suggestive of the historicist style which has been encountered in both the texts by Morpurgo and Hoffman. In creating the sense of the true the reader feels that this is 'reality', albeit in an alien world. This is the monologic voice of the dominant ideology to which, for readers to fully experience a text, they are used to becoming attuned. However, Jones presents an alterity of time and space to which the reader is invited to become accustomed, which questions the metanarrative of history. This process begins with the subtle use of time on the housing estate.

Stylistically this textual realm sits between the Reigners' world and the Wood. This serves as an indication that time here is also at a mid-point between the other two realms. It appears to be B-series-absolute, and time here is experienced by Ann, and apparently the other occupants of the housing estate, in a linear fashion. This view is disrupted when it becomes apparent approximately two-thirds of the way through the narrative that this is not quite true. Mendlesohn (2005: 75) explains that this perception of the time is deliberate as 'the mimetic style persuades us to understand Ann's place in the housing estate as a marker of reality'. When the reader first encounters Ann she is a girl of twelve with an overactive imagination, confined to bed due to a virus: 'That old farm was so secretive [...] that she was convinced it was really a hideout for gangsters. She was sure there was gold bullion or sacks and sacks of drugs – or both – stored in its cellar' (27). This image of Ann is disrupted though, as the reader understands, at the same time as she herself does, that she is:

Vierran. This is Vierran speaking. Vierran to myself. This is at least the second time I've sat in the inn bedroom despairing, and I'm beginning to not quite believe in it. If it happens again, this is to let me know there's something odd going on (258)

The reader then learns that Ann is Vierran, a fact that the character must remind herself of, stating 'Ann – no *Vierran*, she told herself' (274, italics in the original). Mendlesohn (*ibid*) argues that this manipulation of B-series-absolute time into A-series-relative time is to make apparent that 'it is not objective time but subjective time, the metronome in our heads, that is being manipulated'. This manipulation occurs to reinforce the sense that history, and thus time, is itself a construct, and part of a metanarrative open to questioning and interpretation. It is significant that this occurs in the same place as the utilization of the mirror to create the heterotopia of the back-to-front world, as this is also the site of Ann's loss of identity.

In second wave feminism, female identity is perceived as a construction of the patriarchy. From her name, to the way a woman looks, to her consigned role as wife, mother, or *Femme Castratrice*, the lives of women are still seen as controlled by the patriarchal ideology. In rejecting the self constructed in B-series-absolute time, and thus in not recognising her own reflection in the back-to-front world, Ann/Vierran is recreating herself in the feminine space of the Bannus and the Wood. The Wood is firmly within A-series-relative time. Events here unfold, as the blurb

states ‘like human memory; it doesn’t reveal its secrets in chronological order’. Usually seen from Ann’s perspective, Mordion and Hume’s relative experience of time can be easily missed, but ‘Mordion’s and Hume’s event coordinates are experienced in different order by Ann, and the A-series-relative of past, present, and future are experienced differently by each’ (Mendlesohn, 2005: 74). This space is characterised by the use of the internal voice to narrate, suggesting that this space and time is akin to an ‘emotional island’ or ‘conscious dream’ and constructed of ‘concentric circles of time’ (*ibid*) in which events change position with regard to other coordinate events. For example, Ann asks ‘I was wondering if your eye was better’ and Hume responds ‘Of *course* it is! Years ago!’ (118, italics in the original). This sense of time, which combines with the liminal space of the Wood to allow for a re-creation of the motifs and ideologies associated with Arthuriana, is strengthened further when Kristevan timelines are used in conjunction with Mendlesohn’s reading of the fantasy timelines in *Hexwood*.

Referring to the use of a specifically feminine time, Kristeva (1986: 192) argues that ‘female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains an eternity from among the multiple modalities of time’. Cycles are of course associated with female biological functions, and more closely related to natural time, removed from the influence of the patriarchal. Much as liminal spaces allow for the juxtaposition of the wilderness and the civilised to compare ‘the purity of the natural world [as] set up against the corruptibility of humanity’ (Carroll, 2011: 76), the juxtaposition of these timelines in Jones’ text allows for the reader to make the comparison of different ideologies on both the spatial and temporal level. Kristeva defines linear time as masculine time as it is the means by which the metanarrative of patriarchal history is constructed; ‘time as departure, progression and unfolding – in other words, the time of history’ (*ibid*: 192). Monumental and cyclical timeframes are feminine because of their association with natural rhythm and maternity; they are ‘thought of as necessarily maternal [...] repetition and this eternal are found to be fundamental’ (*ibid*). Thus the temporal frameworks of the masculine and feminine are counter to each other as ‘female subjectivity as it gives itself up to intuition becomes a problem with respect to a certain conception of time’ (*ibid*), and that conception of time is the dominant, masculine framework. It is

significant then that Jones rejects the linear, masculine, time of the historicist novels, instead preferring the action of her text to unfold within the feminine timelines of the monumental and the cyclical. Through this lens it becomes apparent that the housing estate also provides a temporal heterotopia, and although not a liminal space in the way that the Wood is, it allows for Ann/Vierran to reinvent herself in her own image, rejecting that imposed on her by patriarchy. By allowing the oppressed to find power in feminine time, Jones allows the reader to not only question the construction of reality but to see the discrepancies in the patriarchal social structure. Mendlesohn (2005: 76) argues ‘Ann’s awareness of the wood comes from her ability to spot the dissonance between the A-series and the B-series time lines’, and is thus dependent on her ability to utilise the opportunities afforded within the feminine time to subvert the patriarchal ruling system. She is attuned to the feminine time and early on recognises the discrepancies between the alternative temporal frameworks. This is first apparent when she realises ‘[s]he had cut that knee running away from Mordion’ (63). This realisation, very early in the narrative, is the first indication that time is not running as it should, and Ann’s awareness of this is essential to her mastery of the Bannus field. It is necessary to see and to be aware of the temporal, spatial, and metanarrative aspects of cultural construction to reimagine them, and, as Mendlesohn (2005: 77) explains:

B-series-absolute time is initially depicted as rational and intellectual, whereas A-series-relative time is experiential and hence less reliable. In the conclusion, however, it is those depicted as firmly convinced of their understanding of the B-series chronology of events – the Reigners – who prove to be most susceptible to the Bannus’ manipulation of experienced time.

Therefore it is not the threat posed by the ‘other’ that undermines this Arthurian interpretation, but rather the static nature of patriarchal ideology itself which causes the downfall of the empire of the Reigners, or, as Jones herself phrases it, the new hand of Reigners is chosen because they ‘are very hard to deceive’ (370). Consequently it is the agency of those trapped within the Bannus, the rightful rulers, that enables them to excise the ghosts of the past and to reimagine a future social structure which is free from the confines of the ruling order under which they have been subjugated.

The ‘other’ which is given agency is not only the feminine, but the masculine threat too, drawing back to the Arthuriad’s earliest roots and drawing on the proto-feminism of Geoffrey.¹⁴ Jones uses the positive functions of fantasy to encourage questioning and subversive readings. Mendlesohn (2005: 72) explains ‘it takes some while for the reader to question the time narratives in this book’ as ellipses versus real time are motifs of the fantasy genre, but once this questioning commences, nothing of the Arthuriad is left sacrosanct, and arguably this enables a shift in the hold of the psychology of myth over the reader’s interpretation of the narrative.

6.6 Reimagining the psychology of myth?

Feminism and psychoanalysis have long been seen as complementary theories of textual and cultural interpretation. So far this thesis has explored psychoanalytic theory and the psychology of myth as restrictive models of interpretation which exercise a hold over the popular imagination, primarily through the conviction of the falsely obvious. Barthes (1970b: 150) describes myth as ‘speech *stolen and restored*. Only, speech which is restored is no longer quite that which was stolen: when it was brought back, it was not put exactly in its place’ (italics in the original). It is therefore possible to see myth as a language, or semiological system (see Appendix C), which has been removed from its historical origins and returned to contemporary usage laden with ideological traces and cues (Fairclough, 2001). By removing myth from its original context and reimagining its intertextual usage as a process of semi-analysis,¹⁵ Jones allows for the possibility of removing myth from its consigned role of second order semiological system, reinvigorating the signifier and signified, and offering alternative interpretations to these functions. Ang (2010) argues that what Barth says about Borges could also be said of Jones, in that ‘[h]is- [or in this case, "her"] artistic victory, if you like, is that [s]he confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work [...] It’s about throwing out the bath water without for a moment losing the baby’ (Ang, citing Barth, 1997: 62). This is related to the work of the fantasy genre, which

¹⁴ Arguably this also begins to reimagine the nationalist ideology depicted in the other texts discussed.

¹⁵ Discussed on pp.149: 158.

enables this reimagining, and thus the release of the *Arthuriad* from the hold of the mythical. Hancock (2005: 47) argues that in fantasy the psychology of myth is less significant as:

[f]or readers, the interplay between the collective unconscious, the images created by a writer from a distanced temporal and spatial location, and those readers' own interpretations of the metaphorical dimensions underlying fantasy texts, offers simultaneously the opportunity for self-analysis and a sense of what such narrative functions suggest about the underlying personal and collective angst of life.

Thus it is arguable that the temporal and spatial dynamism of Jones' narrative allows for a process of individuation which liberates the narrative from its regressive base in the post-War period. This is particularly relevant when the relationship between agency and individuation is understood as the path to individual freedoms. While this will be explored in more detail in the following sections of this chapter, it is interesting here to view it within the framework of abjection which the agency of the 'other' usually gives rise to.

The theme of abjection has been demonstrated in Tennyson's emphasis on Guinevere's 'humiliation in sin' (Knight, 1983), and will form the central thrust of the argument of the following chapter, but in reference to *Hexwood* it takes a different form, where abjection is used to demonstrate the opportunity for agency which this process opens up to the protagonists. Viewed in postfeminist terms,¹⁶ it is possible to read the core argument of what postfeminism means in Jones' text, although in this case it refers not only to women, but to the disenfranchised men as well. This is apparent when the process of abjection is examined through Ann's shock 'at how thin [Mordion's] face was' (181) because Mordion had starved himself in order to feed Hume, and Yam's frozen joints (177). While they occupy a shack in the woods, the Reigners in the Bannus field live in a castle which embodies the medievalism of Arthuriana: 'The king wishes to make it known that no man bearing arms may enter this castle unless he first defeats the king's Champions in a fair fight' (168). This contrast between the living environment of Mordion, Hume and Yam, as well as the bandits led by King Arthur, with the lordly manner of the overtly patriarchal pseudo-Camelot, emphasises the abjection of the

¹⁶ See p.9 for a definition of postfeminism.

‘other’. By placing them in the feminised space of the liminal wood, Jones allows for agency to be found within this space and through their abjection. As the postfeminist argument above suggests a ‘focus on individualism, choice and empowerment’, and thus agency and individual achievement depends on the opportunities created in adversity.

Mordion, Ann and Hume achieve this despite some accidents along the way such as the description of ‘Mordion [as] a tumbled brown heap with blood streaming from a gash in his wrist. His blood covered hand was still obstinately clenched around that wizard’s staff [...] “I got it wrong again”’ (198-9). This is followed by Mordion ‘sitting here outside the house for hours now, trying to force himself to a decision. He knew he was ready to make a move’ (253). In making this move together Ann, Hume and Mordion manage to negotiate a space within the patriarchal ruling framework to overcome their subjection and abjection in order to become the new rulers of the Reigners’ world. This generic and formal liberation, in terms of the temporal and spatial modes, allows the liberation from the psychological hold of myth. Ang (2010) argues that ‘[w]ith the suspension of normal sequencing the narrative perpetually surprises given that no usual reader expectations of plot or narrative can operate where there is no discernible plot pattern or narrative progression’. This is not unproblematic, as there remain areas of the text, as yet unexplored, which do not lend themselves to a reading of the text as one which is liberated from gender and national ideologies, and as such reinscribe the language of myth in a different format.

6.7 The motherhood rejection and the embracing of the ‘princess’

One of the principal issues involved in the representation of gender in *Hexwood* is that of the unreliable narrator. This has largely been dealt with above, in terms of Ann’s realisation that she is in fact Vierran, and the subsequent freedom from subjection that her regression to a childhood state has afforded her. Another way in which this enables a freedom is through the possibility this allows for redressing the motherhood narrative, as:

[t]he freedom that SF offers from the constraints of realism has an obvious appeal [...] its glorious eclecticism, with its mingling of the rational discourse of science with the pre-rational language of the unconscious – for

SF borrows from horror, myth and fairytale – offers a means of exploring the myriad ways in which we are constructed as women. (LeFanu, 1988: 5)

One of the biggest criticisms levelled at children's literature, and particularly Arthurian literature for children, is the regressive representation which it affords to women, limiting them to the role of wife, mother, or dangerous 'other', often in the form of the witch. This limiting construction is given new voice in fantasy and SF, and this is most apparent in the way in which Ann's childhood state frees her from the constraints of socially and, more specifically, patriarchally ordained maternity.

The motherhood narrative has been discussed as a construct with regard to previous texts in this thesis, most notably as a means of affirming patriarchal control. While historicist retellings foreground the importance of the male heir, as well as the obliteration of the maternal from the hero's story in order to ensure that he is the child of patriarchy, effectively giving birth to himself, Jones adopts an alternative view. The first instance in which readers become aware of the motherhood narrative in *Hexwood* is with the creation of Hume during Ann's first trip into the Wood when Mordion requests 'permission to make use of your blood' (51). The blood is received through the cut Ann has already suffered in fleeing Mordion (43), and thus this blood, unlike that of Guinevere in Hoffman's text, has no association with the menstrual until Mordion uses his blood to 'mingle with Ann's blood on the path' (53) until 'a bare body had risen, lying face down in a shallow furrow on the path. A fairly small body' (53). This is the male child Hume, whom both believe to be the product of the Bannus, but is in fact real, as is revealed at the close of the narrative. In this way Ann becomes an active part of the motherhood narrative, but at the same time rejects the need to care for the child, telling Mordion '[y]ou should look *after* him!' (55, italics in the original), while she returns to her life on the housing estate, paying periodic visits to the Wood. This seems quite close to the motherhood narrative of Igraine in Hoffman, in her rejection of Arthur, but whereas Igraine's story is inscribed with the penance and abjection which must follow such an action, Ann's story is free from this, and becomes instead a rejection of patriarchal values in the feminised space of the liminal Wood.

This becomes apparent when the reader realises that this action is a manipulation of the instruction which Vierran has received from Reigner One to 'go into the

Bannus and breed with the Servant' (245).¹⁷ Although the instruction comes after the act in the narrative, the complex temporal framework frequently results in actions preceding the events which make the motivation for them clear, and in this instance Vierran has manipulated the opportunities of the Wood in order to comply, but to do so under her own agency, thus breeding while rejecting the motherhood narrative until such a time as she can enter into this on her own terms. Mendlesohn, (2005: 21) argues that:

Jones [...] is distinctive because she reverses the route map to adulthood. Jones posits that power is a direct consequence of the acquisition of agency. Because agency is about the ability to make conscious choices [...] agency cannot be acquired solely with the conferring of power.

This argument is strengthened when examined in the context of Hancock's argument that 'Jungian analysis [...] has forward-looking momentum in its processes; it examines the drive towards integration of the conscious and unconscious as a way of moving toward psychic "wholeness" for the maturing subject' (2005: 44-5). Rather than seeing motherhood, particularly of a male child, as the route map to a sense of wholeness, as seen in the motherhood narrative depicted by Hoffman, Jones sees agency as the path to individuation and the realisation of psychic wholeness. This is made possible by the embracing of the feminine space and the manipulation of the patriarchal system. This portrayal of the motherhood narrative supports the supposition that Jones has successfully redressed the regressive effect of the mythical form. However, within this narrative is the suggestion of shame over the body, which is less easily reconciled with the above reading.

The shame arises when Ann as Vierran recalls the circumstances of Hume's 'conception' in the wood. At the time she had 'climbed, until she was able to thrust her head through a bush of smaller branches and scramble astride a strong bough' (44). As her adult self, Vierran recalled this moment, and 'put her hands to her heated face and shuddered. She would never dare go near Mordion again' (262-3). This is interesting, as the moment of realisation happens *outside* the Bannus field, and thus beyond the scope of the feminised liminal space that this affords the

¹⁷ The reader is aware by this point in the narrative that the servant and Mordion are one and the same. See the cast of characters in Appendix I.

protagonists. This is still problematic though, since it could be seen as complicit with:

overt anti-feminism [which] presents woman as simultaneously a sex object and sexually ignorant. Thus the attempt to subvert a particular social ideology is actually preconditioned and controlled by an attitude which is only a darker aspect of that very ideology's construction of woman. (Stephens, 1992: 94)

This is reinforced not only through Ann's obvious sexual ignorance, but through Vierran's depiction as 'a sexual being' (Kaplan, 2010: 200). This leads to issues surrounding Vierran's own placement of herself as an object of the male gaze,¹⁸ undermining her own subjectivity in the process and therefore once outside the liminal space reverting to the view of the patriarchy, suggesting rather worryingly that the advances the 'othered' have achieved are temporary, and unstable. This could be a comment on the state of contemporary feminism in the face of a backlash from those who see it as defunct, such as the postfeminist movement, or those who feel it has failed to deliver.¹⁹ Fears surrounding this have been explored by other contemporary authors, including Margaret Atwood, who investigates the results of the decline of feminism coinciding with contemporary political and economic policies which erode the rights of women. As Jones uses the the majority of her narrative to depict the successful achievement of individuation and agency, it seems unlikely that this would be her conclusion, and therefore the reader is left with the impression that this is an instance of the implicit ideology leaking through the explicit to reveal a certain number of unchallenged assumptions.

This is notable given Vierran's reversion to the heteronormative role of the female heroine. Kaplan (2010: 200-1) explains that '[i]t is Vierran who gets a character arc, and hers (focused on romance and politics, and learning the necessary shame for her eroticizing flirtation with Mordion) would be entirely unsuitable for Ann'. Vierran realises that this has been part of the intention of the Bannus, as 'the Bannus had got round the Servant's training too, and shown Vierran Mordion the man' (262). This culminates in a scene where 'Vierran seized his free hand in both of

¹⁸ The implications of the male gaze are discussed in Chapter Five.

¹⁹ See Susan Faludi's influential book *Backlash* (1991) for a full account of the reaction against feminism.

hers. To her great relief, Mordion's hand curled round and gripped her fingers in return' (366). It is clear from the continuation of the narrative that this is the culmination of the book long flirtation, and therefore a reiteration of the girl catching the prince. This is not the usual passive heteronormative role of the woman though, as transitivity analysis, which focuses on who does what to whom, would suggest that in making the first move, in being active in the evolution of her romance, her agency is rewarded, not punished, as has been the case in many other interpretations of the *Arthuriad*. A similar arc emerges when the character of Siri is examined.

Siri is Ann's cousin, a member of the House of Guaranty, who outside of the Bannus field works with Vierran as part of the resistance against the Reigners, and works for the family business in a high powered position (231). However, once inside the field she becomes Lady Sylvia, of whom Vierran comments 'Siri was clever. This girl seemed to have no mind at all. Yet Vierran remembered Yam saying that the Bannus could not force any person or machine to act against their nature' (284) and she dismisses Lady Sylvia as a 'dumb blonde' (*ibid*). This may be a deliberately subversive view of female sexuality and the pursuit of the male gaze, as depicted in popular fairy tale romances. The subtlety with which this is portrayed, along with Vierran and Mordion's eventual heteronormativity, lends credence to the suggestion that much as Vierran must learn the requisite shame associated with adult femininity, Siri must learn to adopt the role of 'dumb blonde' or stereotypical princess in order to be truly fulfilled. The suggestion that the Bannus brings out the inner nature of the person raises a worrying ideology that coincides with the above mentioned backlash against feminism, and aligns *Hexwood* with the ideology contained in Tennyson's text. Such a position maintains that a woman's essential nature, in line with the postfeminist argument posited above, is different to that of a man's, and consequently feminism has taken her away from the desire to be feminine in the manner that Siri presents in the Bannus. Thus gender performativity is not behaving in ways stereotypically associated with normative gender roles, but in suppressing these in order to conform to the model offered by feminism. Mendlesohn, (2005: 22) suggests that this in itself is part of the individuation process, as 'it is the making of choices not the choices themselves that are the route

to adulthood'. Therefore this depiction shows a myriad of options to achieve adult subjectivity and happiness in line with individual choices regarding performativity and the exercise of agency. This view of gender and the 'other' has a profound impact on the representation of nation within *Hexwood*.

6.8 Reimagining the 'other' and ideas of nation

This chapter has looked throughout at the disruption Jones offers to the traditional depiction of the 'other' and the way in which the liminal spaces and temporal disruptions allow this transition to take place. This has been particularly effective when considering gender binaries and issues of agency, but it is also relevant to the construction of ideas of nation. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, Arthuriana, both in the canonical literature and contemporary children's literature, has a preoccupation with the intertwined relationship between the adoption of socially condoned gender roles and national stability.²⁰ Arthur and Camelot have a peculiarly English quality, and the evolution of the nationalist ideology within the genre can be traced according to the contemporaneous needs of the English state. Other nations also represent Arthur in differing ways depending on the relationship the nation has with England. This has been briefly demonstrated in relation to the *Chanson d'Ogier* and its intertextual relationship with *Hexwood*. The depiction of liminal spaces is also significant when examining the emphasis on nation portrayed by Jones.

The central plot thrust of *Hexwood* is the Bannus' selection of the new hand of Reigners. The narrative commences with five Reigners, four men and one woman, and an obvious allusion to Morgan La Fey, whose name is Morgan le Trey.²¹ The majority of these Reigners are easily manipulated by the Bannus field, and become subsumed into the web that it spins around the characters. Ang (2010) explains that:

[t]he "inner folds" of the Arthurian narrative rearrange themselves to reorganize our knowledge of Ambitas, Morgan La Trey, and Sir Fors, as Reigners Two, Three, and Four. The meaning of "Orm Pender" is made suddenly clear as he is transformed into Worm/Wyrm Pender, a corrupted Pendragon.

²⁰ In the case of Arhuriana, national stability can be taken to mean the patriarchal ruling class, which has its Arthurian embodiment in Camelot.

²¹ She is Reignier three.

This makes *Reigner One* the textual representation of Uther Pendragon, as Arthur exists in the text as an outlaw.²² His transition into an actual dragon in the closing battle represents not only the moment at which the existing hand of *Reigners* is defeated, but also ‘demonstrates how essentially wicked are the taken-for-granted narratives of the conventional heroic fantasy of the predestined king’ (Mendlesohn, 2005: 50). The difficulty with this is the structure of the ending of the novel, which replicates the model of the hand replaced (370-371) with four men and one woman, with the only key difference being that the first and second *Reigners* are now in a heteronormative romance, replicating the model of king, queen and advisors more typical of the medieval model of rule. Consequently, while it may highlight the difficulties inherent in the model of the pre-destined king, all those who rule at the end of the book are also pre-destined, as demonstrated by their ability to communicate telepathically. This is shown throughout the text, and the reader is told ‘[q]uite a number of the old *Reigners* heard voices’ (260), therefore demonstrating that the new *Reigners* are just as much a part of the patrilineage as those whom they succeed.

One of the reasons why this may be the case, and why those who have negotiated their own agency within the liminal, feminised space, revert to the performance of normative gender roles once this space has served its purpose, is in the traditional depiction of Avalon as a space for healing and restoration. In keeping with the view of the cyclical and monumental timeframe which characterize this space, this aligns the Wood with a ‘womblike’ place (Pérez, 2014). Imagined in such a way, Avalon is a regenerative space, a place of rest and recovery before ‘rebirth’. It is notable that in this instance of rebirth the maternal figure of the liminal womb is the cause of this event, which inverts the notion of the masculine, or patriarchal, rebirth which is signified by the removal of the sword from the stone. This places the feminine within the scope of the nationalist ideology, and reimagines it away from the patriarchal stronghold of the historicist texts. However, the return to the patriarchal model at the closing of the narrative, a narrative still situated in England and which honours Arthur with a place in the Hand of *Reigners*, along with Merlin, worryingly

²² *Reigner One* is also referred to in the text as *Orm Pender*.

seems to undermine much of the positive cultural work which the rest of the narrative has achieved. Hunt (2001: 34) argues that ‘the powerless who upset the counsels of the great – as a metaphor for the Englishness of a land, it is very potent’. In this way the Englishness of the narrative is reinforced, and the narrative, which reinvigorates the gender dynamic of the Arthuriad along ideological lines more in keeping with contemporary society, is undermined by a conservative view of nation.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter began with Stephens’ (1992) assertion that Jones, while writing fine fantasy fiction, has unwittingly reproduced an anti-feminist rhetoric. Through the exploration of the fantasy genre’s liberating possibilities, and Jones’ use of the liminal and feminising space of the Bannus it has been demonstrated that, unlike the historicist fictions, *Hexwood* moves away from the recreation of an anti-feminist ideology, although not without some problematic elements. Most notably the depiction of the nation remains largely unchanged, although Jones manages to negotiate a space for female agency which offers an alternative perspective on the patriarchal nation state. However, the feminine influence has a finite period of efficacy, with a route back into the patriarchal being a necessary element of the womblike liminal spaces. Hixon (2010: 182) sums this up, stating:

a hopeful future and a continued positive balance of power rest on individual morality and open-mindedness. Such a message emphasizes personal autonomy and thinking for oneself, and in this respect Jones can be considered a subversive author for children. Yet in other ways, though always entertaining and even challenging, she is very much a conservative, if not conventional, author.

Consequently *Hexwood* is only partially successful in releasing its Arthurian material from mythical speech and thus reimagining the ideology which it contains. This is still a departure from the historicist depiction of gender, but it is interesting to explore an alternative material form and discuss the impact this may have on the mythical speech of the Arthuriad.

7. Abjection and the *Femme Castratrice* in *Merlin*

7.1 Introduction

While Jones made her Arthurian material virtually unrecognisable to all but the most knowing of readers, the BBC production *Merlin* (2008-2013) presents an image of Arthur in an obviously pseudo-medieval setting, but one radically altered from the medieval texts. Packaged as a remake which is doing something totally different to anything that has gone before, it still falls within the sword-and-sorcery model of traditional children's fantasy and, like Jones' text, is enjoyed by an audience from a diverse age range.¹ This chapter will focus in particular on the magical women found across the five series of *Merlin*. As the character of Morgana La Fey is the most prominent magical woman in the series, it is the representation of this key Arthurian character which will be the focus of this chapter. This discussion will be informed by the work of Pérez (2014) whose monograph, *The Myth of Morgan Le Fey*, includes a discussion of the character of Morgana within *Merlin*. Due to the fact that this is a relatively new series, there is, as yet, little scholarly work on the series, although it is expected that this will change due to the popularity of the series. To inform the discussion of *Merlin* this chapter will also draw on the work of feminist psychoanalytic theory, particularly that of Minsky (1996), Creed (1993) and Williams (1995). Perhaps the most influential of these texts on the construction of this chapter has been the work of Creed (1993), whose monograph, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, explores the construction of the monstrous-feminine, situating gender as central to the construction of monstrosity. This chapter uses this in conjunction with Önal's (2011) theory of the motherhood narrative and the concept of the anti-mother, a woman made monstrous by her lack of 'normative' maternal desire. This

¹ It was aired on a Saturday evening to target a family audience. While family viewing is a separate thing to child viewing, this thesis aims to explore the impact of the show on the child viewer. This may be affected by the enjoyable experience of family viewing, inducing the child viewer to be more susceptible to ideological content, although this is currently unverifiable.

combination of theories allows an approach which opens up space for a new and alternative interpretation of Morgan La Fey and the division of the feminine.

The division of female characters in to ‘the light and dark aspects of the goddess’ who ‘struggle for the life of the hero’ (Hourihan, 1997: 178) appears to become more firmly drawn throughout the story arc, and as such a comparison of the ending of both Morgana and Guinevere, as well as the obvious parallels which the series draws between the ‘good’ knights, including Arthur, and the untrustworthy women, will be explored. Drawing on the work of feminist psychoanalytic theorists such as Williams (1995), Breuer (2009) and Creed (1993), this gender binary will progress into a discussion of the trend in recent fantasy and horror productions to sexualise the witch figure. It will be argued that within contemporary Arthurian material this figure emerges as a vampiric extension of the Lamia and Lilith, anti-mother figures who drained the strength from men through their deviant sexual activity. These representations have become intertwined in modern representation with women’s deviant politics and economic practices. Such a depiction of the sexually deviant woman has a direct impact on the way in which the core themes of gender and nation interrelate, and provides interesting material for a discussion of these ideologies within the framework of a popular twenty-first century interpretation.

In order to further the examination of gender and nation and draw parallels to Victorian fears of the step-mother, as seen in Hoffman’s *Women of Camelot*, the representation of the anti-mother in *Merlin* will extend the exploration of the disruption of the motherhood narrative as discussed in Jones’ *Hexwood*, and will engage with postfeminist theory to explore the possibility that Morgana and other strong women portrayed in this series are representations of the postfeminist woman. The problems of such a reading will be considered by applying Kristeva’s work on abjection. Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to add a word on the methodology employed in the analysis of the series. This chapter will not take a film theory approach, and while some of the visual images portrayed will be discussed, this will principally be within the framework of a literary approach, with thematic, character and plot elements analysed. In line with the feminist approach mentioned previously, this will focus on transitivity analysis, which, Wareing (1994: 119) argues, is ‘concerned with how actions are represented: what kind of

actions appear in a text, who does them and to whom'. With the depiction of Morgana at the forefront of this chapter's exploration of gender and nation, it is prudent to begin with an examination of the way in which her character develops throughout *Merlin*.

7.2 The changing faces of Morgana La Fey

Morgan La Fey was originally a rather minor character,² but as subsequent generations of writers have moulded and manipulated the tales of Camelot to suit their own ideological ends her significance has grown, as has her subversive power, and she has become, according to Brueur (2009: 2), the thorn lodged deep in Arthur's side, the constant source of unrest in Camelot, and primary threat to the patriarchal power symbolised by the ruling authority of Arthur's court. Thus, in *Merlin*, Morgana becomes a major character, and a principal driving force behind the plot development. The average viewing figures across the five series was seven million viewers each week. In today's over saturated television market, the importance of this series should not be underestimated as its representation of gender roles reaches significant numbers of children in a way that books simply do not.³ What is particularly interesting about this adaptation is the rhetoric with which it is packaged. Julian Murphy, executive producer, says, this version is 'interesting and unusual and original [...] because our take on the legend is a bit different' (2009). Taking a 'before they were famous approach', the viewer is presented with a core cast of just four characters, those of Prince Arthur, Merlin, Guinevere, and Morgana. With the intention of showing them grow into the familiar characters, the first series starts when the characters are in their late teens and early twenties. Morgana is Uther's ward, Merlin is Arthur's contemporary in age and his servant, and Gwen is a ladies' maid, daughter to a blacksmith. Most significantly, this is a society in which magic is outlawed and all who practise sorcery live under the threat of exposure and execution. Both Morgana and Merlin, as well as the court physician Gaius, possess, and use, magic. As the series progresses, five knights are

² See Chapter Two, and the exploration of Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*.

³ There are some exceptions to this, such as the *Harry Potter* series of texts, although it is arguable that more children are familiar with this series through the films of the books and the paratextual and hypertextual material which surround the core novels.

introduced: Leon, Gwaine, Lancelot, Elyan and Percival (see Appendix J). The motif of the quest is largely lost as most of the dangers they face come from within Camelot, and these dangers are nearly all female. The BBC's *Merlin* website, and their albums of each series' 'Heroes' and 'Villains' reveals the gender imbalance presented, with all the heroes being men and the primary villain in each series being a woman: Nimueh, Lady Catrina, Morgause and of course Morgana (see Appendix K). By series four and five, Morgana is the primary threat to the stability of Camelot, with all the other villainous women having been defeated by the heroic actions of the men.

In series one, Morgana has a very minor role; however as series one draws to a close her feelings of rebellion are revealed, a sense heightened by her clear affinity with Mordred (1:8) and compounded by her declaration to Uther (1:12), that 'you have blood on your hands Uther Pendragon. Blood that will never wash off' and 'one by one you make enemies of us all'.⁴ While it is clear in series one that Morgana has the ability to manipulate those around her for her own ends, there is the illusion that she is essentially good. She looks upon Gwen as a friend, is protective of the other core characters and is maternal towards the druid child Mordred.⁵ This illusion is largely continued in series two, particularly in light of her low level of significance in terms of plot development. In fact there are only three episodes where Morgana is relevant to the development of the story line, and yet it is in this series that the threat she poses becomes apparent. As such, any effort made in series one to construct a sympathetic character with understandable motives is undermined. This is highlighted when Kilgharrah tells Merlin 'the ancient prophecies speak of an alliance of Mordred and Morgana, united in evil. But this union *must* be stopped' (2:11).^{6 7}

Perhaps the most significant development in series two is that of Morgana's active magical powers, rather than the passive prophetic dreams that have been the only indication of her magic up to this point. This occurs in the episode entitled 'The

⁴ In this episode Morgana plans to assassinate Uther, a plan which fails.

⁵ This maternal aspect will be explored more fully in this chapters section of the anti-motherhood narrative, and Morgana's role within this.

⁶ The Great Dragon.

⁷ Italics represent words which were notably stressed.

Nightmare Begins' (2:3), which hints at the darkness that will follow as a result of Morgana's power. As with the dreams, this power manifests itself at night, as an unconscious explosive force that causes her bed chamber to catch fire. This uncontrollable power seems to be linked to her emotions, an element that stands in direct contrast to the calm and controlled magic of Merlin. To help Morgana deal with the fear of the changes she is undergoing, Merlin guides her to the druids in a scene which has clear links to the fairy tale imagery of Little Red Riding Hood (see Appendix L). This depiction carries a weight of sexual implications and moral warnings which highlight the significance of Morgana's powers manifesting themselves at night, during the time associated with witchcraft and the lunar power of the feminine. Morgana's magic is the outward manifestation of her sexual awakening, and by pursuing a greater knowledge of magic she is defying Uther and wandering off the patriarchal path that will keep her both chaste and the model of ideal femininity.

This is the first sign that Morgana may turn into a *Femme Castratrice* (Creed, 1993), or castrating woman, an untamed sexual female who will threaten the patriarchal powerbase of Camelot through her refusal to conform to a normative role. This indication is compounded in 'The Witch's Quickening' (2:11). Not only is this the episode in which Morgana aids the druids to steal the Crystal of Neotid, a weapon so powerful it will help them to destroy Uther and all who are loyal to him, it is also notable that 'quickenings' is an archaic word which describes the onset of labour. Consequently it is possible to read Morgana's involvement with the Druids as the moment of her rebirth as a witch and the bane of Camelot. This is interesting as it has been noted in previous chapters that Arthur is effectively reborn as the child of patriarchy through his removal of the sword, obliterating the mother from his narrative. It is arguable that Morgana, allowed freedom from the constraints of Camelot through the Druids and Merlin, becomes doubly 'othered', as the child of those who are 'other' and through her gender. Morgana rejects the patriarchal constraints and expectations, and this reintroduces the notion of the castration fear induced by the foreign 'other' as introduced in Geoffrey's depiction of the Mont St. Michel episode. This representation of Morgana is strengthened as it is in this episode (2:11) that she is first shown as having sexual desire, a desire directed

towards the Druid elder, a man not only of a lower social standing than herself, but also one whom her father-figure would have killed; her desire highlights the growing subversive nature of both her sexuality and power.

The viewer is also introduced to the notion of Morgana's divided self as she states 'I've become so used to concealing the truth [...] I don't want to be brave, I just want to be myself', a significant element from both a psychoanalytic and feminist angle. Ussher (1989: 14) argues that women cannot be both good and bad; they must be categorized as one or the other; this 'inevitably leads to consternation and splitting in the individual woman, who must deny one aspect of her experience'. In Camelot, Morgana must deny her power and her sexuality, and it appears that it is this that leads to her deeply embedded hatred of Uther, and eventually Arthur. Through Morgana La Fey the series shows young viewers that if women fail to embrace the passive role imposed by patriarchal social order they run the risk of not catching the prince,⁸ and of being alone and castigated by society, an element of *Merlin* highlighted when Morgana tells Merlin, '[d]on't think I don't understand loyalty just because I have no one left to be loyal to' (4:12). A significant aspect of the apparent vulnerability which Morgana still displays is that it runs counter to the physical transformation which she undergoes through the course of the first four series (see Appendix M).⁹ The change in Morgana's physical representation is evident of her growing sexualisation, which begins with the Druids, and coincides with her growing and subversive powers; this in turn gives rise to the depiction of Morgana La Fey as the embodiment of the *Femme Castratrice*.

7.3 The *Femme Castratrice* and images of nation

The image of the *Femme Castratrice* is closely related to the witch, as she is the figure of the woman outside of matrimony who can control, subvert, and threaten masculinity, or symbols of masculinity. Breuer (2009: 15) suggests that 'a widespread interest within the Arthurian romance genre [is] the exploration of gender conventions through the forces of love and magic'. As a result of the

⁸ As Guinevere arguably does through her embodiment of passive femininity. This will be further discussed in the concluding section of this chapter.

⁹ Note that Morgana's appearance between series 4 and series 5 changes very little, if at all.

pervasive stereotyped representation of women as either love object or dangerous subversive, 'certain representations become more normal; certain representations become "other"' (*ibid*: 6). This sense of the 'other' is emphasised throughout *Merlin* through the notion of destiny, and a fate which cannot be escaped. The viewer is afforded glimpses of the future through the prophetic power of the Druids and Kilgharrah. These indications of the future are significant, as the dragon, Kilgharrah reiterates many times that Arthur and Merlin have a shared destiny; the viewer is informed that Gwen is destined to marry Arthur, but that Morgana has 'chosen to turn her back on her own' and 'chose not to use her gift for good' (2:12). Theoretically this could lend itself to a pro-feminist reading of the plot structure as Trites (1997) argues 'a feminist book is one that offers choices to characters of both genders'. This stance could be supported by Morgana's clear loyalty and bond with Morgause, as Lehr (2001: 15), as discussed previously, indicates '[f]eminist children's novels reject the notion that heterosexual relationships are more important and supersede friendships and bonds between women'. However, in aligning herself with Morgause, as Morgana does in series three and four, she turns her back on her friendship with Gwen, and therefore her female bond is one which is fuelled by a reaction to patriarchy, not a positive choice based on equality and friendship. Consequently the choice Morgana has made, when considered in the context in which this choice is framed, cannot be viewed as a positive representation of female agency. In presenting her actions as a choice, Morgana is constructed as even more monstrous and this representation is an example of the dangerous use of female agency. In destiny there can be no blame assigned; in choice she becomes an aberration, a true *Femme Castratrice*, who has refused to adopt societal expectations. As Creed (1993: 1) argues '[a]ll human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject', and in this construction of Morgana it is possible to read society's definition of the monstrous-feminine being one of the woman who chooses to discard the conventional feminine role.

This reading of Morgana's apparent choice is reinforced through the examination of transitivity analysis. Wareing (1994: 120) explores this element of discourse analysis, defining it as having three distinct areas of interest: action processes, in

which human activity is involved; intention processes whereby deliberate human agency is directly related to the action or outcome; and supervention processes which describe actions which happen to people which they did not intend, such as falling over. Supervention processes are of less significance with regard to this reading of Morgana's choice, but the action and intention processes are significant, particularly as this discussion moves on to explore agency and abjection. Despite her apparent strength and control, it can be argued that Morgana is primarily acted upon by those in power, and as such those who represent the patriarchy of Camelot, with the exception of her depiction as sexually deviant *Femme Castratrice*. Wareing (*ibid*: 122) explains that this method of analysis can be used 'to question the construction of a female character who is apparently assertive and in control of her life'.

The sense of the monstrous, which is inherent in the embodiment of the *Femme Castratrice*, is heightened by the overt way in which Morgana uses her sexuality to get what she wants. Her tightly laced corset and plunging neckline visually emphasise her sexuality, which is depicted in stark contrast to the courtly attire of the princess and maid servants. This is highlighted by the Medusa-esque nature of her hair, which has been styled to resemble serpents, and thus represents the danger which Morgana poses to the patriarchy.¹⁰ Creed (1993: 7) argues that '[i]n the horror film, the representation of the witch continues to foreground her essentially sexual nature' and as such in both fantasy and horror representations the witch's function of seer and healer has been lost, and she has become an 'implacable enemy of the social order [...] irrational, scheming, evil – these are the words used to define the witch'. This is the result of the fear of female sexuality, and it is this which creates the sense of the 'other' and the monstrous.

This sexual element is illustrated in *Merlin* by the conversation Morgana has with her accomplice, Helios:

Helios - You are welcome to stay.

Morgana - Take care not to get too distracted Helios . There is still much to do. Once I am crowned queen of Camelot you may indulge all you wish. (4:11).

¹⁰ This also provides an intertextual connection to the depiction of Vivien in Tennyson's text.

The sexualisation and manipulation of desire leads to parallels between the character of Morgana and the figure of the *Femme Castratrice*. The link between the *Femme Castratrice* and the *Vagina Dentata*, a myth which, according to Creed (1993) can be found in some form in every society, is apparent in this scene. Morgana, despite this flaunting of her sexuality for the manipulation of Helios, has no real love interest. All the other key characters have romantic relationships, but Morgana and Morgause, while using their sexuality, are alone. The fact that Helios and Cenred both end up dead heightens this sense of the danger the sisters pose to any man foolish enough to become entangled with them, reiterating the threat the ungoverned, or single and sexually uncontained, woman poses to the stability of the patriarchal social order. This enactment of the castration complex can be perceived as a continuation of the theme as it was introduced in Geoffrey's *Historia*. However, the underpinning ideological impetus is significantly different, and the contemporary representation places a greater emphasis on the dangerous feminine.

The castration complex implicit in Geoffrey's text centres on the exorcising of Henry's own sense of emasculation in the face of his brother's more strident patriarchal power and as such is depicted through the slaying of the giant.¹¹ In the interceding years the witch, the giant's female counterpart (Breuer, 2009), has replaced the symbol of threat to the ruling authorities, and in the process the threat to national stability has shifted to reflect the contemporaneous fear of the rise of feminine power. This is significant, as this alters depending on the primary perceived threat at any given time. While Arthuriana has retained the image of Morgana as threat, her influence over Mordred has varied. On occasion Mordred acts with little to no influence from the dangerous feminine, on others, such as in Morpurgo's text, Morgana is the primary motivator for Mordred's actions. This can also be seen in other fantasy writings, such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, written in the aftermath of the Second World War, and consequently embodying nationalist fears over invading, masculine forces, in which the feminine is marginalised.¹² It is therefore interesting that in *Merlin*, while Mordred casts the

¹¹ As discussed on pp.33-34.

¹² Tolkien's text is still pervasively sexist, but this is portrayed through the removal of the feminine, rather than the presence of dangerous women.

final blow to Arthur, he is not his son, and therefore the patriarchal threat of competing claims to the throne is removed, placing Morgana as the only rival claimant and thus the sole cause of threat. Her role in Mordred's slaying of Arthur is reiterated throughout, through the prophecies of Kilgharrah, and in many ways this replicates the didactic function in Morpurgo's text, with his forewarning of the dangerous feminine. Situated as such, and jealous of Arthur's place as heir to Uther, she is the embodiment of the female constructed as lacking. Minsky (1996: 53) argues:

[i]n some women, penis-envy, as an enduring narcissistic sense of lack, may be experienced [...] [and repressed] into the unconscious, symptoms may take the form of the denigration of all men. The female psychical equivalent of the male misogynist or the ultra-patriarchal male is the 'castrating woman'. Both these stances toward the opposite sex appear to spring from [...] narcissistic dissatisfaction with a self experienced as imperfect or lacking.

Consequently the sexually voracious woman who seeks the accoutrements of masculinity through castration is acting upon the internalisation of the male perception of the female as lacking a penis, rather than possessing a vagina. This leads to resentment of the male, and results in the need for validation through processes which extend beyond the bearing of the male child, as depicted in Hoffman.¹³ In *Merlin* this extends to attacking Arthur's throne, his castle, his knights and his queen, and the corruption of knights such as Agravaine, whom she can psychologically castrate. The castration complex and the fear of the castrating woman extends beyond the psychological effect on the male psyche and has an implication for the depiction of nationalist ideologies. Although *Merlin* is less focussed on the Englishness present in some of the former texts examined, it perpetuates the pervasiveness of the Victorian ideology which situates the unmarried and ambitious woman, the rejecter of patriarchal constraints, as the primary threat to national stability. This position is made overt in series five, with the connection between Morgana and the Saxons, combining both the feminine and patriarchal threats to national stability.

¹³ Morgana enacts her penis-envy through the attempted seizure of Arthur's symbols of masculinity. Obsessed in Malory and Morpurgo with the theft of Excalibur, she misunderstands the significance of the sheath, the female symbol, as protector, rather focussing on the phallic symbol of patriarchal power embodied in the sword.

The preceding four series make no mention of the Saxon invaders and the threats which Camelot faces are situated in the magical ability of women such as Morgana and Nimueh, with the occasional skirmish with rulers of one of the other four kingdoms that comprise England in this version of the *Arthuriad*.¹⁴ In series five the threat to the nation that emanates from the ‘other’ is intensified, as evidenced in ‘The Disir’ (5:5). In this episode the three witches who form the ancient Disir foretell Arthur’s fate and, in attempting to combat this, Mordred is injured. Merlin, who is aware of the role Mordred will play in Arthur’s demise fears this representation of the feminine, acting through Mordred, and misreads the situation. Arthur has a greater fear of the overt power of the matriarchy and refuses to accept the offer of the Disir to revoke the prophecy of doom for him by accepting the old religion, and embracing ‘the great goddess’. In rejecting the feminine power offered by the Disir, Arthur effectively seals his fate, and this problematizes the image of gender and nation which has previously been presented. While this is continued with the image of Guinevere,¹⁵ it is largely an isolated depiction throughout this series. The image of Morgana in her embodiment of the *Femme Castratrice* is notable for the alliance she makes with the Saxons towards the end, as the series builds to the fall of Arthur, which begins in ‘The Dawning of the Dark’ (5:11).

In this episode the viewer is explicitly told that Morgana is in league with the Saxon attack on a cargo of weapons headed for Camelot. The threat of Morgana, and her role in undermining the stability of Camelot is highlighted when Arthur states to Cara ‘[i]n your words, I hear Morgana. It is she, and others like her, who have abused the powers of magic [...] it is they who have brought a rift between our people’. With this utterance the viewer is encouraged to recall the images of dark and light in which Morgana and Arthur have been cast, thus absolving Arthur of any culpability in his own demise (see Appendix N). This is unusual in terms of intertextual references to the medieval sources, where Arthur’s own culpability in this fall is evident in his inability to maintain the loyalty of his knights and the strength of the Round Table and to prevent the adultery which strikes the final blow

¹⁴ It is notable that even during these battles, the ‘other’ ruler is motivated by a dangerous woman in the majority of cases.

¹⁵ Discussed in the final section of this chapter.

to Camelot. The image of Arthur as the ideal soul of man, and therefore absolved from all guilt is a result of ideology layered into the Arthuriad during the Victorian period, and is consequently a regressive ideological stance, much in keeping with the historicist texts examined. This is a complicated portrayal, as Cara argues, 'it is not a crime to fight for your freedom. It is not a crime to fight for the right to be who you are' (5:11). This is a defence of the position embodied by Morgana and the other magical entities which have thus far threatened the stability of the Camelot, and it has significance at this point of the narrative as the plot revelations suggest that Arthur is not against the practice of magic (5:13), but rather fearful of it in the hands of Morgana, and this again suggests that it is the abuse of magic which has forced Arthur into this position. This is reinforced as the final two episodes relate the climactic battle at Camlan, where Arthur fights not Mordred's forces, but those of Morgana as leader of the Saxon hordes.

The significance of Morgana as war-leader of a foreign invader makes her a doubly 'othered' character. Much like Ygraine in previous discussions, this double otherness coincides with depictions of Morgana as dangerous because of her role as Queen of Orkney, where her position reflects fears of invasion from Northern Europe through the Scottish islands. It is interesting to view this depiction of her as warrior and leader as a representation of postfeminism,¹⁶ and not of anti-feminism. The view of Guinevere supports this potential interpretation at this point in the narrative development, and this progressive view contrasts with the assumption of anti-feminism which can be read into such a depiction. However, it is arguable that a postfeminist reading cannot be sustained, and is quickly undermined with regard to Morgana. This is nowhere more obvious than in the manner of Morgana's death, (5:13) when Merlin runs her through with Excalibur. Merlin's final words to Morgana are 'I blame myself for what you have become', which undermines any notion of female agency in Morgana's actions, making her a product not of a postfeminist society whereby she is capable of forming her own identity and destiny within the existing social structure, but rather the product of an overtly patriarchal culture in which even her demise and her power become the result of a failure of

¹⁶ Postfeminist in terms of a woman who is both feminine and a strong leader.

patriarchy to control her. This is reinforced by Arthur's declaration that Merlin has 'brought peace at last'. This not only suggests that Morgana has been outside of patriarchal control until the point of her death, but that the discord which has existed in the kingdom is solely the responsibility of Morgana, as it is with her death that peace returns. In the act of killing Morgana the series also denies her the power attributed to her by previous writers as the ruler of Avalon, as she can no longer accompany Arthur to the isle. Instead this final act of the liminal power of the feminine space of Avalon, and the feminine power associated with this, is claimed by patriarchy when Merlin uses his magic to propel Arthur towards his final destination. With Morgana's final act being her own death, and the reiteration of her role as the castrating woman, the culmination of the narrative is the depiction of female agency as an act which is inevitably followed abjection.

7.4 Abjection and Agency

The anxiety about female agency stems not only from the fear of the destructive nature of the uncontained female but, as Creed explains, 'Freud's argument that woman terrifies because she is castrated, that is, already constituted as victim [...] serves to reinforce patriarchal definitions of woman which represent and reinforce the essentialist view that woman, *by nature*, is a victim' (1993: 7, italics in original). If woman is not lacking, is not the victim, then this stance affects the phallogentric view traditionally held in Western culture, and consequently the females who reject victimhood, who use agency, must be reminded of their essential victimhood through a process of abjection. The preceding sections have touched upon Morgana's use of agency, and the difficulty of determining how much agency she actually has, since in terms of transitivity analysis and the use of the destiny trope it becomes apparent that her choices are incredibly limited. She is forced to fulfil the role of the villain, as in the repressive gilded cage of Camelot Morgana finds herself unable to find any personal satisfaction, and must repress her nature. In refusing the normative gender role, she fulfils the destiny spoken of above, yet she continues to be acted upon throughout the majority of the plot arch. There are, however, exceptions to this, and at these times, such as with Agravaine and the torture of Elyan (4:11), she becomes truly monstrous. Part of this monstrosity is constructed around her gender, as will be discussed in relation to the motherhood

narrative, and it is this gendered monstrosity, the enactment of agency which rejects all notions of traditional normative femininity, which results in her abjection.

The exchange between Morgana and her accomplice Helios is one such example of Morgana acting under her own agency, and using her sexuality to gain power, and the pleasures she can offer Helios, as a means to procuring his assistance. This is a clear indication that Morgana is utilizing her agency and body in a way that is clearly beyond the control of any patriarchal authority figure and, as discussed in relation to Hoffman, she has become an open-container.¹⁷ Hakim (2011:2) argues that '[i]n sexualized and individualized modern societies erotic capital is becoming more important and more valorized'. Thus it could be argued that Morgana is exploiting her 'erotic capital', and yet she, like all other erring women in the series, has to undergo a process of abjection. This highlights a flaw in Hakim's argument, as she posits that '[a]ttractive people draw people to them, as friends, lovers, colleagues, customers, clients, fans, followers, voters, supporters and sponsors. They are more successful' (*ibid*). However, Morgana, in exercising her full powers, has been reduced from the first lady of Camelot to a rather deranged woman living totally alone in a shack in the woods. She does not draw people to her through the exploitation of her erotic capital, but rather repels them. It is interesting here that the liminal space of the woods, as depicted in Jones' text, is replicated but only to a minimal extent. It is the arena of the 'other', the druids, the sorcerers, and Morgana, and all those who have been disenfranchised by the current patriarchal system of rule, and it is the space in which Morgana can obtain psychological control over not only Agravaine, but also Merlin when she bewitches him (4:6). Consequently, much as in *Hexwood*, the accoutrements of masculinity have no power in this space. It is also the space of Morgana's abjection and loneliness, and thus the site of her punishment, creating an outlaw feminine space. It is in the wood that the viewer experiences Morgana as unable to inspire the loyalty of anyone except through threats or sexual bartering, and as having lost the love, companionship and respect she had in Uther's court. This loss of respect is significant in rebutting Hakim's view of erotic capital. Hakim (*ibid*: 7) continues

¹⁷ See p.134.

her argument, stating that ‘patriarchal ideologies have systematically trivialized women’s erotic capital [and] [m]uch modern feminist writing colludes with male chauvinist perspectives by perpetuating this contempt for female beauty and sex appeal’. Not only does Hakim fail to produce any supporting evidence for this position from contemporary feminist literature, but she also fails to address the issue of respect. While both men and women can utilise ‘erotic capital’ in the way described by Hakim, one of the effects of this is the perception that men are lecherous and women are viewed as having achieved their position as a result of their sexuality and not due to their intelligence. Consequently, ‘erotic capital’ does not ‘supplement intelligence, specialist knowledge and experience’ (Hakim, 2011: 1) but rather undermines these attributes, undercutting the argument that the representation of Morgana’s sexual agency is drawn from postfeminist ideology.

The contrast between feminine and masculine power, and the use of agency by each gender, is highlighted when Morgana and Arthur close series four with a final stand-off, which is notable not only for its dialogue but also its visual impact (4:13). Arthur stands on the right of the screen in his armour, with light shining through his blonde hair, while Morgana stands on the left, in dark lace, curly dark hair, with a hint of green just to highlight her status as stereotypical witch (see Appendix N). During this stand-off they say:

Arthur - What happened to you Morgana? I thought we were friends.

Morgana - As did I. But alas, we were both wrong.

Arthur - You can’t blame me for my father’s sins.

Morgana - It’s a little late for that. You’ve made it perfectly clear how you feel about me and my kind. You’re not as different from Uther as you like to think.

Arthur - Nor are you.

As such each represents a facet of their father Uther, a man described as a benign dictator (Head, 2008), and it is clear from the visual representation as well as the portrayal of their characters to this point that in Arthur is all the good while Morgana represents all that was wrong with King Uther. She stands both visually and metaphorically for the *Femme Castratrice*. As Knight (1983: 116) so eloquently phrases it ‘[s]he is a witch of course – that figure who protects male characters from final guilt’. She represents not only the male absolution from fault, but also allows for the continuation of the belief that feminine power must be

contained and thereby legitimises the continuation of gender inequality and the perpetuation of images of female abjection. The process of Morgana's abjection is a marked departure from Hoffman's depiction of Ygraine's 'penance' (15). While Hoffman somewhat worryingly relates this abjection to the internalisation of patriarchal values, *Merlin* makes clear that the denigration of Morgana is the result of external influences. Although it still legitimizes abjection, it rebuts the process of the female viewer being forced to internalise her own sense of abjection in order to fully realise the meaning of the visual text. This is not, however, the case with Guinevere's abjection.

Gwen's sexual indiscretion amounts to no more than a kiss with Lancelot when she is bewitched by Morgana (4:9). Morgana, for all her agency, acts in an un-sisterly manner as '[s]he could not suffer the ignominy of seeing Gwen on her throne. It is indeed a cruel revenge' (4:9).¹⁸ Gwen is given an enchanted bracelet, and no-one discovers that she has been enchanted. This is significant as Lancelot's bewitchment, which takes the form of necromancy, is revealed. When Lancelot commits suicide shortly afterwards, Arthur states 'I suppose we shouldn't be surprised. In more ways than one, Lancelot was a man of honour'. As in the intertextual material, Lancelot is forgiven and mourned as a hero, while Gwen is castigated and cast out of Camelot. The relationship with Tennyson is clear in this instance, as it is Agravaire who reveals the affair to Arthur,¹⁹ and when Gwen is discovered with Lancelot, she cast herself on the ground before Arthur, who asks:

[w]hat are you still doing on your knees? Am I just your king? Get up for goodness sake. What happened Guinevere? We were happy. I know we were happy. You felt it too. You love him. You've always loved him.

This echoes the scene in Tennyson's 'Guinevere', in which Arthur asks '[l]iest thou here so low, the child/ of one I honoured, happy, dead before thy shame' (280: ll.439-440). For her unwitting involvement in entering into an adulterous liaison

¹⁸ It is somewhat paradoxical, given Gwen's embodiment of the passive woman who catches her prince, that Arthur states he wishes to marry Guinevere as 'I don't want a queen who spends her days floating around the castle and agreeing with my every word' (4:9).

¹⁹ Although he is acting under the orders of Morgana, not Mordred, further emphasising the gendered nature of the threat to national stability.

with Lancelot, Gwen must undergo a period of abjection which begins with this prostration. Interestingly, Morgana enjoys her control over Guinevere, going on to enchant her to appear as a deer who is hunted by Arthur before Gwen's eventual return to court. As for the control she wielded over Lancelot, she tells Agravaine, 'I thought it would please me, moulding his mind. Instead I feel curiously sad. He was once so mighty and now he is nothing but a shade'. The reduction of Lancelot is viewed then by both the patriarchal establishment and the enemy of that establishment as a tragedy, and this reinforces the notion that the masculine, and the power associated with that gender, is inherently more significant. By contrast, the representation of the feminine perpetuates the construction of women as both lacking and natural victims.

Gwen's abjection sees her degraded by her banishment from Camelot, as she goes from being future queen to manual labour (4:11). She is then captured by Helios and subjected to the fear of being forced to submit to his sexual advances, which is reinforced through Guinevere's attire during this period (see Appendix O). During her time with Helios she overhears him scheming with Morgana to attack Camelot and destroy Arthur. She subsequently escapes to warn Merlin of the impending threat,²⁰ and decides not to go to Arthur, stating '[i]t cannot be. Not after I betrayed him. You go. Tell him of the danger [...] I have what I deserve'. During the same episode Arthur reiterates the cost of female agency, asking Merlin '[h]ow many times do I have to tell you? Guinevere made her choice, she betrayed me. Now she must take the consequences'. This foregrounds the theme of the internalisation of phallogentric notions of female agency and responsibility that Hoffman alludes to in her text, and relies on a debt to Tennyson. It is notable too that while Guinevere does undergo a period of abjection and humiliation for her indiscretion while enchanted, Arthur is on several occasions enchanted to become besotted with various princesses or magical entities, and becomes obsessed with the Lady Vivien (2:10) while conducting a relationship with Guinevere, and for this he has to do no more than receive a true love's kiss to be absolved of all blame, thus the Victorian

²⁰ When he finds her wounded in deer form in the woods around Camelot as Morgana has enchanted her in a final effort to ensure she cannot marry Arthur or warn him of the plot against his kingdom.

sexual double standard is evident in the treatment of the infidelities of Gwen and Arthur. What is interesting about this interpretation of the fairy tale trope is that it is reversed. It is Gwen who must kiss Arthur to save him from his bewitchment, and as such it can be argued that female agency is being employed in a pro-feminist manner. Nor is this the only occasion where the use of female agency is viewed as positive.

Unlike Morgana and the other ‘irrational, scheming, evil’ women (Creed, 1993: 76) who appear throughout *Merlin*, Gwen and Annis act against Camelot and accept culpability for their actions. However, while Gwen is enchanted, Annis (4:5) is the only woman who acts against Camelot, in this instance under the ruling authority of Arthur, for reasons that can be clearly understood and which are within the rational bounds of her rightful anger.²¹ Thus the depiction of Annis aligns her with the ‘good’ wife who defends her husband’s honour, and her agency is mitigated through this legitimisation. Sexually desirous and desirable women, such as Morgana, are judged by other women to act out of spite, and viewed as dangerous by men. Annis acts as Morgana never would, as she bows to the superior force of strength and rationality of the court of King Arthur. In so doing she becomes a paragon of the ‘good mother’. Annis is also represented as asexual, which conforms to ideas explored in previous chapters of the legitimate mother as an asexual being, a closed volume. She is not only played by a woman in her sixties, she is depicted in thick, functional furs that hide her figure, while the other villainous women of *Merlin* are draped in silks, lace and chiffon.²² Ussher (1989: 133) argues that in ‘the Middle Ages, wicked women with power who challenged authority were designated witches, their sexuality and their female bodies being seen as a central part of their crime’. This would coincide with Hakim’s (2011) view of the patriarchal repression of female sexuality, as it is viewed as threatening. It is apparent that the depiction of the women in *Merlin* continues this view, with the pervasive sexualisation of the

²¹ Annis does not possess any magical or supernatural powers, but she is the only depiction of a balanced, non-threatening, powerful female.

²² With the exception of Morgause, who frequently appears in battle armour. There may have been practical reasons for this, Emilia Fox being pregnant during filming for series 3, but she no less represents the image a highly sexually *Femme Castratrice*. This discussion will be continued on pp.190-194.

witch figure who refuses societal constraints. While this is a continuation of the ideology of the Middle Ages, the subjection to humiliation and debasement which accompanies this state throughout the series arguably attests to the emergence of retro-sexist ideologies referred to in the introduction.

There is a counter argument to this position of the depiction of Morgana as both *Femme Castratrice* and as undergoing a process of abjection during which she is still largely being acted upon by the society she inhabits, and this draws on the postfeminist stance introduced in the previous chapter. If the representation of Morgana, Guinevere, and other women in *Merlin*, such as Annis, are to be viewed as representations of the postfeminist ideal, of the individual woman who manipulates the opportunities available to her, then the viewer must overlook the depiction of abjection as the punishment for the use of this agency. As Cappock *et al.* (1995: 110) explain, '[u]ltimately, women are instructed that conformity to weakness, passivity and self-sacrifice will encourage male love/approval but that independence, strength and self-confidence will be punished by castigation, desertion and physical abuse'. Consequently it appears that *Merlin* continues the pervasive view of women as inferior to men. The intertextual view of gender is continued through a psychodynamic representation of gender which draws on elements of homosociality and motherhood narratives which may support a postfeminist reading, reflecting a shift in the psychological function of the myth.

7.5 The psychodynamic representation of gender

The difficulty with any depiction of gender in retellings is that 'any retelling will tend to replicate the schema for male-female relations assumed in romance and the notions of chivalry' (Stephens and McCallum, 1998: 150). This replication 'reinforce[s] an antifeminist metanarrative' (*ibid*: 151) as a result of the culturalization of authors into the unchallenged assumptions regarding the essentialist nature of both males and females. This cultural aspect works in conjunction with psychology to create psychodynamics. McLeod explains 'psychodynamic psychology ignores the trappings of science and instead focuses on trying to get "*inside the head*" of individuals in order to make sense of their relationships, experiences and how they see the world' (2007, italics in the original).

The psychodynamic approach combines the theories of psychology, which sees human functioning as based upon the interaction of drives and forces within the unconscious, and between different structures of the personality. As such it takes a cultural and psychological approach, drawing on the functions of deep unconscious structures.²³ The combination of these theoretical approaches allows for an insight into the archetypal representation of men and women within the psychosexual dynamic, and to compare this with the intertextual material previously discussed, focussing on the increasing division of gendered representations in children's texts. This divide is discussed by Walter (2010: 129-30) who argues that:

[m]y daughter is growing up in a world predicated on medieval values, with every girl a princess and every boy a fighter [...] This new traditionalism does not just affect what toys children are expected to play with, it also extends to expectations about many other aspects of children's behaviour.

Walter argues that this phenomenon is increasingly prevalent and impacting on the ways girls are directed to dress, their relationships with others, and their life expectations and ambitions. While Walter is incorrect in assuming this is based on medieval values, rather than those of medievalism, she makes an interesting point which coincides with the psychodynamic representations children are confronted with on a daily basis, through many avenues of culture. To examine the way in which *Merlin* speaks to this cultural trend it is relevant to view this within the context of the anti-motherhood narrative and the depiction of homosocial bonds.

7.5.1 The Anti-motherhood narrative

While previous chapters have examined the representation of the traditional motherhood narrative, with only brief mention of the depiction of the anti-mother, largely because mothers are absent from much of Arthuriana, it is interesting to note that there is very little evidence of the motherhood narrative within *Merlin*. As in the majority of source materials, the mother is an absent figure as, with the exception of Ygraine who serves as little more than a functional plot device, the mother is obliterated from the life of the hero. In *Merlin* the figure of Ygraine casts

²³ Which include Jung's discussion of the cultural creations of archetypes, which have arguably had such a profound effect on the continued sexist representations of women. Psychodynamic theory combines the theories of the collective unconscious (Jung), psychosexual development (Freud), the unconscious mind (Freud), the psyche (Freud), psychological defence mechanisms (Freud) and psychosocial development.

a shadow over the plot, as she died as a result of witchcraft, resulting in the ‘othering’ of all those who practise magic. However, as a person, she does not appear. The powerful Madonna figures and the mothers are a significant structured absence throughout the series, with only the rare exception of women such as Annis who, while a mother, is not shown in this role. One significant reversal of the divine goddess, whose benevolent magic is so useful to Arthur when she appears as the Lady of the Lake, is Nimueh.

In *Merlin* Nimueh chooses to use her power as a destructive force, highlighting her role as an anti-mother.²⁴ Nonetheless the viewer learns that she was once a giver of life, and responsible for the birth of Arthur as she ‘used the magic you so despise to give your barren wife the son you so craved’ (1:9). The viewer also learns that to give a life a life must be taken, and it was this that caused the death of Ygraine, Arthur’s mother, and the subsequent banning of magic and purge that has scarred the land of Camelot. This is significant in terms of the motherhood narrative as it places Nimueh firmly outside the accepted role of wife-mother. Önal (2011: 106) argues that:

[w]omen had to be seen as eager recipients since they became valuable and respectable only within the motherhood narrative, as opposed to barren or childless women, or illegitimate mothers, who constituted typologies for female evils as opposed to legitimate mothers.

By implementing unnatural means to deliver a baby to Uther and Ygraine, Nimueh becomes an unnatural mother, begetting babies by illegitimate means, and in this way she becomes an object of fear as she refuses to fulfil the naturalised role of mother. Nimueh’s role as the magical instigator of the creation of Arthur, rather than Merlin as in the source texts, lessens the implication of the patriarchal control of the state of motherhood, and increases the fear of the feminine ability to control patrilineage and deceive the father as to the paternity of her child. In facilitating this, Nimueh becomes an embodiment of the monstrous-feminine, stepping outside the bounds of patriarchal containment and becoming aligned with the *Femme Castratrice*. It is the refusal of containment which arguably causes a patriarchal society to construct women who refuse this role as dangerous, and the magical

²⁴ This is an alternative view of the anti-mother to that discussed in relation to Hoffman’s Ygraine, yet it is an extension of the same ideology.

ability of both Morgana and Nimueh strengthens the view of both as beyond masculine containment. This ideological stance is made more apparent as Nimueh not only refuses the role of natural motherhood, but goes on to stand in direct contrast to the naturalised social role of woman, as a destroyer of life, made more monstrous in that the life she attempts to take is that of the child she helped to create. She uses the cup of life, a symbol of femininity, and subverts it into a cup of death in both 'The Poisoned Chalice' (1:4) and 'Le Morte D'Arthur' (1:13). This subversion of the 'natural' female desire to create is replicated in the behaviour of Morgana, who can be seen as an extension of the Lamia.

Lamia, whose name means 'devourer', is based on a creature of mythology, one of the original anti-mothers, a precursor to Lilith, the first wife of Adam, who had her children killed for refusing to lie beneath Adam (Önal, 2011: 95), and for refusing to be subservient. According to Önal the Lamia 'attracted men, used up their energy, drank their blood and ate their flesh'. She appears in the fourth series of *Merlin* as a small adolescent looking woman, who has the power to make 'knights [who] are like brothers [...] fight and quarrel like foes' (4:8). The knights display an obvious attraction to her, which is both sexual and paternal, and Lamia performs the role of vulnerable femininity to draw them to her, representing the psychodynamic culturalization of both males and females which conditions them to perform gender according to pre-determined models. She allows herself to be carried like a babe in arms by Percival, and be comforted in the night by Elyan. This is a ruse to get them close enough for her to kiss as 'the High Priestesses took the blood of a girl and mingled it with that of a serpent. The creatures they created had ferocious powers. They could control a man's mind and suck the life out of him with a single embrace' (Gaius, in 4:8). Apart from the obvious symbolism of the serpent, which connects to the Garden of Eden and the fall of man, and the depiction of Vivien in Tennyson, Lamia's presence is significant as the original anti-mother, and devourer, and the archetype upon which the other representations of the anti-mother within *Merlin* are based. Lamia, in her ancient mythical form and in *Merlin*, is both seductress and monstrous mother, and like Nimueh, she is a destroyer of life. Morgana is unusual within this discourse, since she commences the series performing the

stereotypical maternal function, and yet with the rejection of Camelot and its patriarchy, she is transfigured into an anti-mother.

The maternal depiction of Morgana begins when the viewer is introduced to Mordred (1:8), as a druid child, not the illegitimate offspring of an incestuous relationship between Morgause and Arthur. Morgana is still depicted as being maternal towards this child and she risks her life to protect the boy from the knights that hunt him. Yet this protectiveness towards Mordred has the feeling of a dark omen which affects the viewers' judgement of Morgana, although it must be acknowledged that this effect may only be present with the knowing viewer, who already possesses an intertextual awareness of Mordred's role in Arthur's final destruction. This sense is heightened in, 'The Beginning of the End' and a prior knowledge of the Arthurian myth is not required for child viewers to see the bond between Morgana and Mordred as something monstrous. While it is not until series two that Kilgharrah tells Merlin of the prophecy regarding the alliance between Morgana and Mordred (2:11) the fact that Morgana stands against Uther and the hero of the series, Arthur, in her protection of the child, guides the audience, used to relating to and identifying with the male protagonist as a result of western educational policies (Lehr, 2001: 13), to potentially become uneasy by this open threat to the male hero.

The relationship between Morgana and Mordred, which is developed in several episodes throughout the five series, invokes the notion of monstrous maternity. It is notable that Morgana stands as Mordred's surrogate mother, much as she does in Morpurgo's representation, and this reflects the continuation of Tennyson's fear of the uncontained mother. As such, the maternal stance Morgana takes towards Mordred reminds viewers of the function of womanhood, while juxtaposing this with the depiction of the woman who stands outside this socially defined function. Morgana is not a wife or biological mother, therefore she conforms to the archetypal depiction of such women, who 'were usually portrayed as temptresses, a stereotype which is still intact, who were not bound to a home or man, further emphasising the difference between women and mothers' and as such were only capable of producing 'demonic offspring' (Önal, 2011: 107). While her relationship with Mordred creates a sense of unease, it could be argued to conform to contemporary

social and cultural notions of acceptable maternity. Her role as anti-mother becomes more pronounced as the series move on, when, like Nimueh and Lamia, she becomes the destroyer of life. Morgana is so transformed across the five series that she goes from the naturalised role of protector of life, when she and Gwen smuggle food and water to the starving children (1:11), to stating '[b]urn their crops. Let's see how they feel when their children begin to starve', (4:12) in order to coerce allegiance from the people of Camelot. With this act, and others which replicate this sentiment, she is transformed into the anti-mother, increasing the sense of the monstrous-feminine which is associated with her status as witch. It is notable that her monstrosity is so closely related to her gender, and while many of her actions would be monstrous whomever committed the act, it is the rejection of the normative gender role which emphasises and contributes to her monstrosity.

These characters are just a selection of those who can be read as part of the motherhood narrative in its various forms within *Merlin*. What is apparent, even from this limited exploration, is that the positive maternal models, those which could be seen as embracing maternity on their own terms or rejecting it within a postfeminist framework, such as depicted by Jones, are absent. In writing out the mother, *Merlin* leaves viewers with an image of pervasive patriarchal authority, of men who give birth to themselves through acts of bravery, and who represent an authority with which viewers are meant to identify. This authority is represented in *Merlin* by the knights and the homosocial bonds which they share.

7.5.2 Homosocial bonds

The issue of homosocial bonds is discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Malory's depiction of adultery.²⁵ In *Le Morte Darthur*, Malory explores the psychodynamic relationship between men and women to exonerate the adulterous relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot, and in so doing he situates women as an essential part of the stability of the nation. Rather than seeing Guinevere as central to the fall of Camelot, and consequently as operating outside the patriarchal social structure, she is a core element of this knighthood and the bonds of the Round Table. The homosocial bond in this form also feminises the masculine space of the court, since

²⁵ See p.42 for a more detailed exploration of this issue in Malory.

adultery is such a central part of the narrative that much of the plot revolves around adulterous liaisons. The action of many of these adulterous relationships takes place within the bedroom, which functions as a liminal space in much the same way as the wood in *Hexwood*.²⁶ It is in the bedroom that Lancelot and Guinevere are found together, when Lancelot is unarmed, as Malory relates:

“And now I had levir than to be lorde of all Crystendom that I had sure armour uppon me” [...] Then Sir Launcelot unbarred the dore, and with hys lyffte honed he hylde hit opyn a lytll, that but one man might com in at onys (650).²⁷

The removal of the symbols of masculinity within this space is an indication of the emasculation that the knights undergo within such relationships, and the pivotal role of the women within the creation of homosocial bonds invites a proto-feminist reading of gender in Arthuriana. Intertextuality in *Merlin* does not reflect the creation of homosocial bonds along Malorian lines. Rather the homosocial bonds in *Merlin* centre around an idealised notion of masculine banter and camaraderie, which is partially a response to the removal of the centralisation of the theme of adultery, and yet it suggests a worrying trend towards the removal of women from masculine spaces. This is not simply due to the removal of women from a space which has become psychodynamically separated along gender lines, a trend which has continued since the eighteenth century,²⁸ as much of the male bonding which exists within this specifically masculine space is centred on derogatory semantics.

Derogatory semantics refers to the frequent way in which the men ‘banter’ and tease one another to form relationships through the explicit denigration of allegedly effeminate males, and this contributes to the underlying notion that women are weak and, as such, secondary to men. One episode where this is of particular note relates Morgause’s challenge to duel with Arthur.²⁹ Arthur’s remarks on being beaten are significant: ‘I’ve never felt so humiliated in my entire life. I was beaten

²⁶ For a full discussion of the significance of the liminal and heterotopic space in creating a feminised space, see pp.150-154.

²⁷ Trans: “‘And now I will sooner be [more likely to be] Lord of all Christendom than to have sure armour on me” [...] Then Sir Lancelot unbarred the door, and with his left hand he held it open enough for only one man to come in at once’.

²⁸ See pp.61-68.

²⁹ A duel she goes on to win.

by a *girl*' (2:8).³⁰ This is not an isolated incident. In 'Lamia' (4:8), Gwen comes to Merlin's aid when he is under attack by the transformed Lamia-creature, leading to the following exchange:

Arthur - So, Merlin. Being saved by a woman. That really can't feel good.

Merlin - Feels a lot better than being dead.

Arthur - Does it? Being saved by a woman, or dying? I'd have to think about that one.

This is just one such example, and the occasions on which the men taunt each other with their supposed feminine behaviour are numerous. They include '[d]on't be such a *girl* Merlin' (1:11), 'you are such a girl's petticoat' (3:1) and 'don't be such a princess' (3:8). As Walter (2010: 232) argues 'it is time to wake up to the fact that the resurgence of such sexism is reducing the choices available to young women'. Representations in fiction potentially play a role in the shaping of young minds. An argument which has been put forward by many feminist theorists is that:

[d]eliberately or not, in fiction as well as non-fiction, readers are always collecting information about the world and its possibilities [...] practised readers are able to sort out which information is most reliable; but inexperienced or naive readers of any age, particularly children, are more likely to accept questionable information. (Hickman, 2001: 92).

One effect on the child consumer of cultural materials, such as the Arthurian retellings, is the liberation of the form from mythical speech, as Jones managed to partially achieve through the utilization of the liberating fantasy genre and liminal spaces. As Barthes (1970) argues, the alternative material form of the myth should assist in freeing the narrative from the constraints of mythical speech, especially when combined with the fantasy genre. It is interesting to note that the discussion thus far reveals that this is not the case with regard to *Merlin*. The following will explore the reason for the continuation of the restrictive mythical form.

7.6 The psychology of myth

Each text which has been discussed in this thesis has related to the theory of the psychology of myth in subtly different ways, and the treatment of the Arthurian literary relationship with mythical speech as it relates to *Merlin* is indicative of the myriad ways in which the psychological impact of ancient narratives work in

³⁰ 'Girl' is given particular stress in this speech.

relation to the construction of culture. Wiseman (1989: 19) discusses the narrative use of high historicism, which can be mistaken for the historicism of Morpurgo and Hoffman, and influences the construction of gender and nation within *Merlin* in spite of its apparent use of the fantasy genre, arguing that ‘even though the intelligibility of things cannot be read in their relation to reality, it can, and must, be read in their relation to history’. The depiction of the action in *Merlin* bears little resemblance to source materials with the exception of the interrelationships of the characters, as the driving force behind plot progression centres on the supernatural to a far greater extent than in any of the other texts explored thus far. However, Wiseman (*ibid*) goes on to argue that any attempt to ‘fall outside history’ will see the work either lost or claimed by the tradition that the writer has ‘tried not to inherit’. This assimilation into the tradition has been noted in relation to Jones’ narrative,³¹ and while it appears that the writers of *Merlin* have made no such attempt to remove the series from the weight of tradition, making full use of medievalism as an ideological framework, they produce an interesting juxtaposition between the pseudo-historical and the fantasy genres in order to continue the sense of a metanarrative based on unquestionable truths.

Barthes (1970b: 109) provided the starting point for the inclusion of this series within the context of this thesis, and as such it is appropriate to explore his theory for the continuation of the mythical form, despite the alteration of material form. He argues that ‘[m]yth is a value, truth is no guarantee for it’, and it is apparent that the value system, the comparison between a bygone era and contemporary society, reverts to the historicist ideologies as found in Morpurgo’s text. As all literature, be that visual or textual, depends on the two-way exchange of meaning (see Appendix A), a great deal of the perpetuation of regressive ideologies in mythical form is dependent on the sheer volume of cultural input which exposes children to the same regressive ideology. As Barthes (*ibid*) notes ‘myth is a double system; there occurs in it a sort of ubiquity: its point of departure is constituted by the arrival of meaning’. This departure and arrival, the exchange of meaning between the creator and the consumer, are dependent on the semiological and metanarrative function of

³¹ See pp.167-170.

the mythical form, and it is significant that this conforms to the normative model of Arthuriana within the contemporary period. In *Merlin* this is overtly signalled through the use of the semiological system which situates women as expressly 'less than', and as occupying both an undesirable space and one which is threatening to normative ideas of masculinity. The continuation of this ideology is explored by Mitchell (2000: xix), who explains that women 'in terms of both their socio-economic position in the family and of the psycho-ideological construction that predisposes them to that location, [...] become the repositories of [...] human conservatism'. This is apparent throughout *Merlin* and it becomes evident that despite the seemingly incoherent narrative intertextuality which mixes many traditions, stories, and new inventions, the sense of women as repositories of conservatism is a revision of the ideological function of Tennyson's Victorian text. However, the fifth and final series of *Merlin* does somewhat alter the image of the ideologies of gender and nation, as it revisits the proto-feminism of Geoffrey's *Historia* when creating an alternative ending for Guinevere.

7.7 Guinevere and the End

Geoffrey's text makes mention of Mordred *and* Guinevere being left in charge of the kingdom in Arthur's absence. Subsequent texts also suggest that Guinevere went on to bear Mordred children, yet the majority of texts in the post *Historia* period restrict Guinevere's role to that of chattel, to be passed into the care of an alternate patriarch. This remains the case even in the 'feminist' revision of Hoffman, and as a result of this Guinevere takes refuge in the convent once Arthur's empire has fallen. Much as there is a postfeminist argument for the depiction of Morgana, which under close scrutiny collapses, the representation of Guinevere in *Merlin* once again raises the prospect of a feminist re-vision. This is by no means unproblematic, not least because of her previous depiction as the embodiment of the passive princess. The post-feminist argument cannot be discounted though, as, upon Arthur's departure to Avalon, it is Guinevere who takes the throne, with the announcement '[t]he King is dead. Long live the Queen' (5:13). This is preceded by Arthur sending his royal seal to Guinevere in the care of Gaius, with the words 'if I am to die, I can think of no-one who I would rather succeed me'. This revisits the argument raised in conjunction with Geoffrey's text, which suggests that he has

a proto-feminist motivation for his writing, fuelled by political motivation in paving the way for the succession of Matilda (Tolhurst, 2012). *Merlin*, despite its apparent anti-feminist narrative until this point, seems to grasp this intertextual element and reinvigorates it for a modern audience. It is notable that this narrative emerged at the same time as the rule of primogeniture was revisited throughout the Commonwealth, and this reimagining reflects the altered position of women within contemporary society. It is a notable exception, and it stands as more so as the role of Guinevere as servant prior to marrying Arthur is referred to frequently throughout the final series.

Guinevere's former role as servant seems to be a preoccupation during the rule of Uther, and the primary reason for the delay in their marriage, but between Arthur and Guinevere it is rarely mentioned. Yet as the narrative moves towards its denouement, Sarrum states 'all that stands in our way is a serving girl who plays at being queen' (5:8) and Guinevere herself tells Arthur 'I used to be a servant, remember?' (5:10).³² This iteration of her former status suggests that her later depiction is in fact postfeminist as her individual strength has allowed her to work within the social order to attain upward social mobility and achieve her desired goals. In actuality, this ignores the real struggle of women, particularly those from the working classes, and sweeps aside one of the major concerns of contemporary feminism.³³ This disregard for a feminist approach is continued through the inclusion of body shaming, with the inclusion of flippant comments, such as:

Merlin – [Guinevere's] a lot heavier than she looks
Gaius – That may well be treason.

While the overt sexualisation of the witch figure represents a fear of the sexually desirous woman, this reference to the female body reinforces the insidious message of the necessity of women maintaining an image of fragile female beauty. The need for this is reiterated when Guinevere falls under the spell of Morgana (5:6) and her only means of rescue is through the love she holds for Arthur (5:9). Gwen has

³² This is said while she is helping him to dress.

³³ It is also significant that the ethnicity of Angel Coulby, the actress who plays Gwen, is never mentioned, and as such the majority of the narrative continues the depiction of gender under the guise of the way things used to be, while ignoring historical and contemporary issues of race and class.

become an ‘empty vessel filled by the will of another’, and the only part of her ‘true self’ that remains is the love she holds for Arthur. To be saved from the fate which awaits her at Morgana’s hands, where she will become complicit in the murder of her husband and then be killed, this part of the self must be reached. This fairy tale motif, a version of true love’s kiss, has been recreated in recent tales such as *Maleficent* (2014) and *Frozen* (2013), where the female bonds of sisterhood and those between mother and child are more important than those associated with the romantic love. By contrast, *Merlin* recreates the notion that a woman’s salvation resides in being desirable to men. Guinevere attains this through her passivity and embodiment of traditional female beauty and temperament. Consequently, it is through her representation as the stereotypical princess that she can be saved and achieve the role of queen.³⁴ However, it is difficult to mitigate the impact of the final image of her as autonomous ruler (see Appendix P), until the viewer understands that she can only hold this role with the support of the knights (5:7) and thus she is not an ideal embodiment of matriarchal power.

7.8 Conclusion

While the depiction of gender is problematic throughout, *Merlin* largely recreates the regressive ideology of the Victorian Arthuriad, and its intertextuality is a piecemeal approach to retaining and recreating features of the Arthuriad which are complicit with a regressive ideology of femininity. This is largely related to genre, and while Jones utilises the fantasy genre to liberate the narrative from its mythical form, *Merlin* subscribes to the restrictive form of the genre which arose in the post-War period of sword-and-sorcery retellings. Crossley-Holland, (2000: 19) explains ‘the teller may well choose to change the emphasis of a tale so that it speaks to her own time and society’. Yet contrary to this, the teller may also wish to speak to the values s/he wishes to emphasise within society, and draw on narratives of the past, particularly those which have created and sculpted the myth of tradition. All the texts explored in this thesis have approached the retelling of this most ancient of stories in an array of styles, material forms, and genres. However, the impact these

³⁴ Her passivity is reinforced when, during Morgana’s captivity, Gawain states ‘A maiden in a tower? A damsel in distress? I was born for this moment!’ (5:6).

interpretations by contemporary authors have on the child reader and the shaping of the ideology of gender and nation within a wider social context remains to be determined.

8. Conclusion

Each of the texts explored in this thesis has approached the retelling of the Arthurian myth using different perspectives, alternative material forms, and differing genres. The theoretical approaches employed within this discussion have been utilised in order to examine the ideology embedded within Arthurian literature, and with a focus on how this has become associated with a medievalism which is being used to portray gender and nationalist ideologies that are frequently historically inaccurate.¹ It was the supposition of this thesis that these ideologies seem to be desirable within a twenty-first century discourse which has embraced the Victorian model of gendered and national representation. The discussion of the core texts has demonstrated that the seemingly unchanging nature of the Arthuriad is false, and that each generation of authors has manipulated the core plot motifs to their own ideological ends. Despite a seeming adherence to Malory's seminal text there is demonstrable interference from the Victorian era, which became prevalent in post-War children's literature. This trend appears to continue into the modern era, and although this small selection of texts cannot provide any definitive answers with regard to the depiction of gender and nationalist ideologies, they do suggest a trend towards regressive representations.

Diana Wynne Jones' *Hexwood* is arguably the most progressive of the texts discussed, and this is achieved through the use of liminal and heterotopic spaces. While Jones is not the only author to utilise this technique, and the liminal can be seen in other texts, the way in which Jones manages the Wood space and the Bannus field to reimagine the political hierarchy is arguably a successful use of these techniques which allows for a move towards a feminist retelling. However, much like Reeve's *Here Lies Arthur*, the manipulation of gender, nation and the 'other'

¹ By its definition, history is itself ideological. In fact ideology has played a significant role in skewing history to support the contemporary notions of gender and nation.

does not allow for a reimagining of the ending of the narrative. Nevertheless, the liminal space has been shown to be an effective way to liberate the narrative, and, while the use of the fantasy genre is paradoxical, it can be an effective means of releasing Arthuriana from its transcendent status as universal myth. Not all authors have made use of this though, and have overlooked the potential contained in Malory's text for promoting gender equality in these spaces. In fact, while Jones makes the most prominent use of liminal spaces, Hoffman's narrative and *Merlin* both incorporate elements of the liminal without allowing these to be a means of reimagining the gender binary.

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, the gender binary remains intrinsically linked to notions of nation and national stability. The liminal spaces allow for a temporal equality and within this a representation of the 'other' as not dangerous but containing the possibility for renewal. Despite this view, fear continues to be associated with this potential. Consequently, the majority of the texts explored restrict the liminal, or depict it as a place for the containment of the *Femme Castratrice*, on her own or in league with a dangerous invading patriarchy, as demonstrated by the depiction of Morgana in *Merlin*. This more closely associates women with a danger to national stability than even Tennyson portrays, and while his text has been described as pervasively anti-feminist (Knight, 1983), his depiction is related most strongly to the failure of the men to control the sexually desirous woman, or to the dangers of the sexually erring woman bearing children, and thus threatening the patrilineage as well as the morality of any children borne. This is significant, as it is continued and magnified by late twentieth and early twenty-first century authors through the use of the liminal and the construction of the sexualised witch and the monstrous-feminine (Creed, 1993).

A significant reason for the persistence of regressive gender and national ideologies is the mythical form of Arthurian literature. Barthes' (1970b) *Mythologies* has been influential in exploring this area, as has the work of Freud and Jung, and the notion of the falsely obvious has been discussed in conjunction with psychoanalytic theory. The seizure of Arthuriana by mythical speech is a central factor in its utilization as a vehicle for regressive ideologies. The tales of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table have become, in the public consciousness, so intrinsically

related to the denigration of women through the removal of the mother, sexual infidelity, and the witch figure, that it is problematic to reimagine the material in a new and progressive vein. While authors of Arthuriana for the adult reader have been more successful in using the fantasy genre to alter the representations of women and nation, this has yet to have an impact on the more conservative field of children's literature, as the didactic function remains firmly in focus. Some authors, such as Jones and Hoffman, have attempted to reclaim the material, with varying degrees of success, and yet the implicit ideology of the author, inflected by their lived experience and intertextual knowledge, ensures that children's Arthuriana remains entrenched in retro-sexist and regressive nationalist ideologies. It has been argued that the depiction of gender, rather than reflecting the continuation of patriarchal values, portrays a postfeminist ideology. The sexually desirous female is a depiction not of the woman suppressed by normative gender models but a woman utilizing her 'erotic capital' and exercising agency in accordance with the individualisation of contemporary society. Equality is achieved through embracing the differences between genders, and capitalizing on these.

It is notable that the sexualised female does not use her sexuality free from castigation, but is rather condemned for this and made abject. Contrary to Hakim's (2011) assertion that 'erotic capital' can achieve popularity and draw people to them, the women of Arthuriana find themselves alone and isolated. While this could be argued to support Hakim's claims that the patriarchy has persisted in denying the power of the sexual woman and that this representation is a continuation of the containment of women, this is not a sustainable argument. Hakim also attacks feminists who deny this power, accusing them of colluding with patriarchy, and as such fails to see the advances of third wave feminism which embraces the ideology of freedom of attire and personal representation, without insisting upon overt sexualisation in order to coerce men, gaining power over men through a manipulation of the so-called male 'sexual deficit'.² Third wave feminism argues for options, and for women to use their agency without castigation, and as such the

² Sexual deficit refers to the notion that men hate women because they are angry at their lack of willingness to meet their sexual needs. This suggests that men always want more sex than they can get, and are therefore open to manipulation by a sexually desirable woman.

representation of women within contemporary Arthuriana seems to support not a postfeminist or feminist ideology, but the maintenance and continuation of patriarchal social constructs.

While it has been demonstrated that the representation of gender and nation is influenced by genre, as is the approach of the reader to a given narrative, this cannot definitively provide a liberation from the constraints of mythical speech. While it would appear from this sample of texts that narratives which employ historicity are more likely to be inflected by implicit ideology despite authorial intentions, it is not sufficient to suggest an alternative genre may cease the perpetuation of regressive ideologies. As has been demonstrated through the use of both *Hexwood* and *Merlin*, fantasy can take a range of forms, and while Jones' narrative utilizes fantasy for the liberation it can provide, combining this genre with an interrogative intertextuality, this style of fantasy retelling is in the minority. The greater number of fantasy retellings are modelled on the post-War style of regressive Sword-and-Sorcery fantasy, as perhaps best demonstrated by White's *The Once and Future King*. Many of the texts discussed in Chapter Three, in relation to twentieth century children's Arthurian literature, can be read as variations on this schema, and regressive Sword-and-Sorcery fantasy remains the most prominent format for contemporary retellings for the child reader. Even texts which assume a historicity, such as those by Morpurgo and Hoffman, follow this regressive model, and they can be argued to owe a debt to the work of Rosemary Sutcliff, whose historical rendering of the Arthurian tales for children takes a different generic form but a familiar ideological structure to White's seminal work.

The impact this has on the actual child reader has not been the focus of this work, although there are other scholarly works which do investigate this, for example Grenby (2008). However, this thesis has investigated how texts promote dominant readings through textual traces and cues, and this, while not being definitive, suggests a potential that child readers have to read against the grain in order to resist the regressive ideology contained within the text. As Breuer (2009: 5) argues 'representation shapes material existence. The representations of gender produced by culture – through language and literature, through film and art [...] and so on – shape the notions of gender available to people within that culture'. Consequently,

the regressive representations of both men, women and nation within the majority of Arthurian material for children are cause for concern, as they have the potential to limit the way in which the child reader can imagine the future, and their role within society. One way in which this could be more accurately measured with relation to the material discussed is through the exploration of hypertexts. Never before have children and YA readers had so much opportunity to engage with a text in so many different forms, and the wealth of material available on the internet not only allows children to imaginatively engage with textual material in diverse ways, it also has the potential for the child to relate their experience of the text to a wide audience, and to continue the story, through fan fiction, art, and the creation of online gaming experiences. An exploration of such satellite texts would be both an interesting and valuable continuation of the work contained within this thesis, and one which would allow the researcher to understand the impact on actual child readers, both male and female, and perhaps the future of the text and the Arthurian myth.

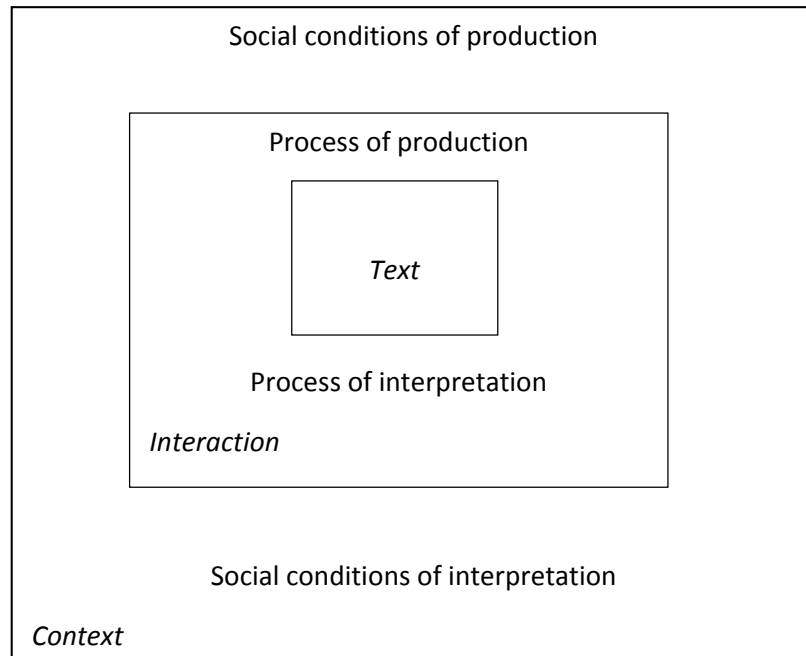
It has not been possible to examine all Arthurian texts written and produced for children, and the view of gender has been limited to the way in which such portrayals affect women. There is, of course, an implication for the male reader in these representations, not only of women, but of hyper-masculine knights and kings. As indicated, there is scope for further study, with regard to hypertexts, masculine representations, and an examination of children's literature produced within different cultures. For example, there is an excellent Finnish book, *The Tails of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* (Kunnas, 1997), in which Guinevere is a canine champion darts player, and Arthur is a rather diminutive feline king. It is a delightful, fun picture book which presents a vastly different view of the tales to that presented in the majority of English texts. What this thesis has done is begin a discourse, within current Arthurian and children's literature studies, of areas previously overlooked by both.

A study like this has not been conducted previously, and while interest has been shown with regard to the use of the hero quest narrative in children's literature, and the development of adult Arthuriana with regard to gender, a serious study of these issues, and particularly on the intertextual nature of ideology and the cultural

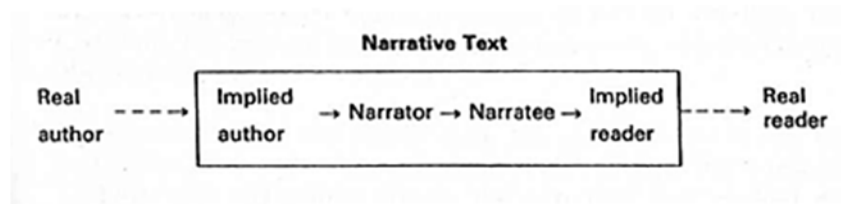
implications of this, has not been undertaken. Much scholarly attention has been paid to fairy tales and their impact on the child reader, and many works exist, such as those by Stephens (1992) and Stephens and McCallum (1998), which examine the theoretical implications of a wide range of children's literature. The application of these theories to the Arthurian myth has not been undertaken, and this has implications not only for the field of children's literature, but also Arthurian studies, as academics can begin to understand the way in which the ideology and intertextual usage of the medieval texts is manipulated to the detriment of both contemporary literature and future interpretations of the canonical texts. In addition, while great interest has been paid to the cultural reasons for the maintenance of regressive ideologies, on which this thesis has drawn, no study has yet interrogated the psychological reasons for the maintenance of the mythical form. By investigating the theories of Barthes, Freud and Jung, this work aimed to begin to understand the reason for the seemingly unchanging ideology of myth, while in actuality each generation recreates or maintains the mythical form for unconscious social and cultural reasons which agree with the psyche's need for the continued view of the self. This deeply ingrained, inherited unconscious is indicative of the reason why, regardless of genre, none of the texts explored has been totally successful in reimagining the gender and nation dynamics of the *Arthuriad* in egalitarian terms. Therefore, through understanding the ideological motivation for Arthurian reworkings it is possible to see the emergence of implicit ideology at work, and to potentially alert authors and readers to this, thereby encouraging critical and resistant readings which may, in turn, lead to more progressive reimaginings.

9. Appendices

A. Model of textual interaction and the production of meaning. Fairclough (2001:12).



B. Model of the components of narrative communication. Seymour Chatman (1978: 151, cited in Wall, 1991: 4).

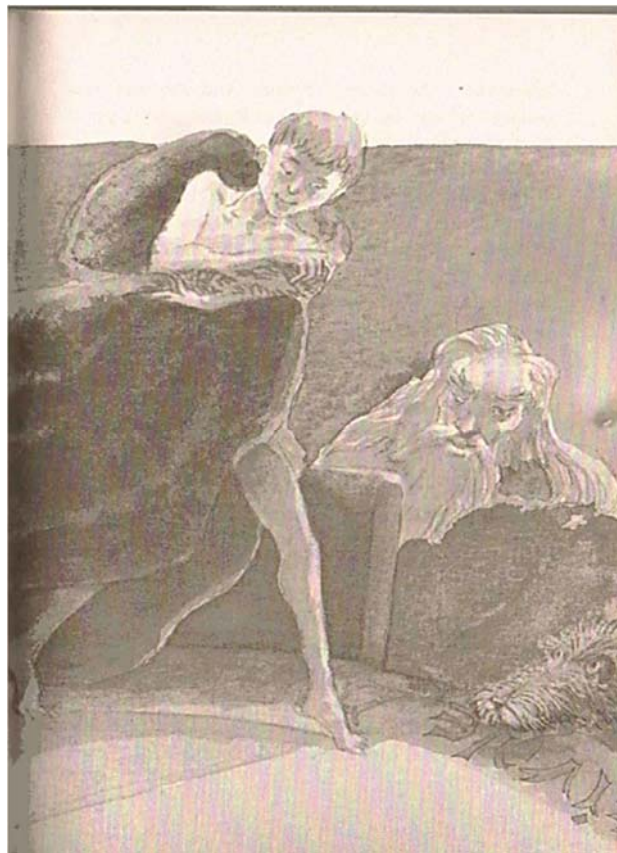


C. Model of mythical semiological system. Barthes (1970b: 137).

Language	1. Signifier	2. Signified
	3. Sign (or Meaning)	
Myth	1. Signifier (or Form)	2. Signified (or Concept)
	3. Sign (or Signification)	

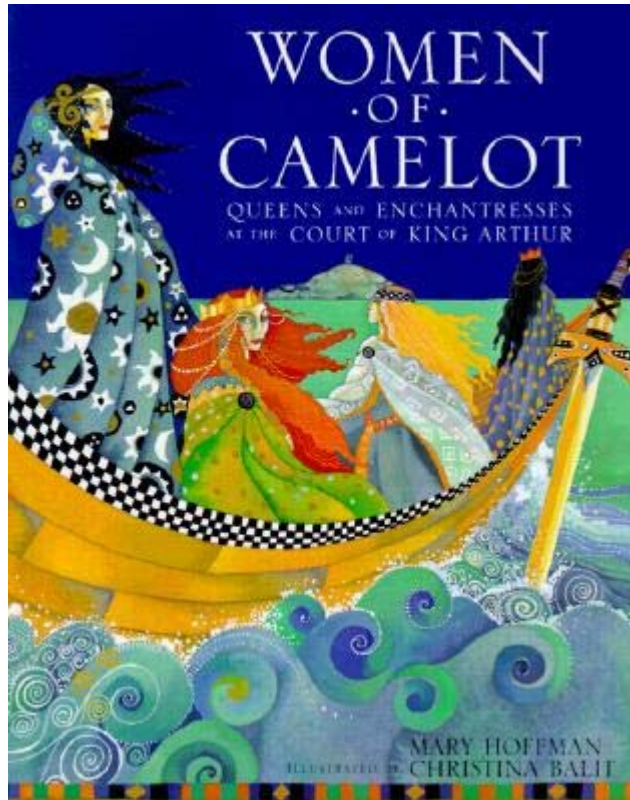
D. Image from Morpurgo's *Arthur, High King of Britain*. Illustration by Michael Foreman (1994)

Depicts the young protagonist with Arthur, after he wakes up believing Arthur is God.



E. Cover illustration of Mary Hoffman's *Women of Camelot*. Illustration by Christina Balit.(2000)

The cover is suggestive of the implied reader.



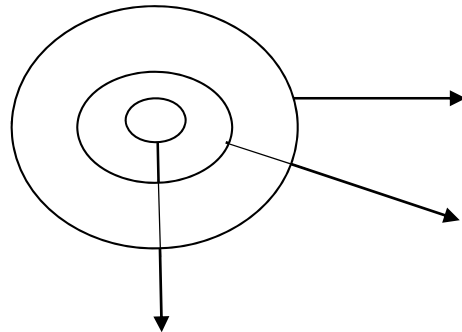
F.i. 'Lady Lilith'. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1866-8, altered 1872-3).



F.ii. Guinevere. Balit's (2000) illustration in Hoffman's *Women of Camelot*



G. The temporal as experienced in *Hexwood*

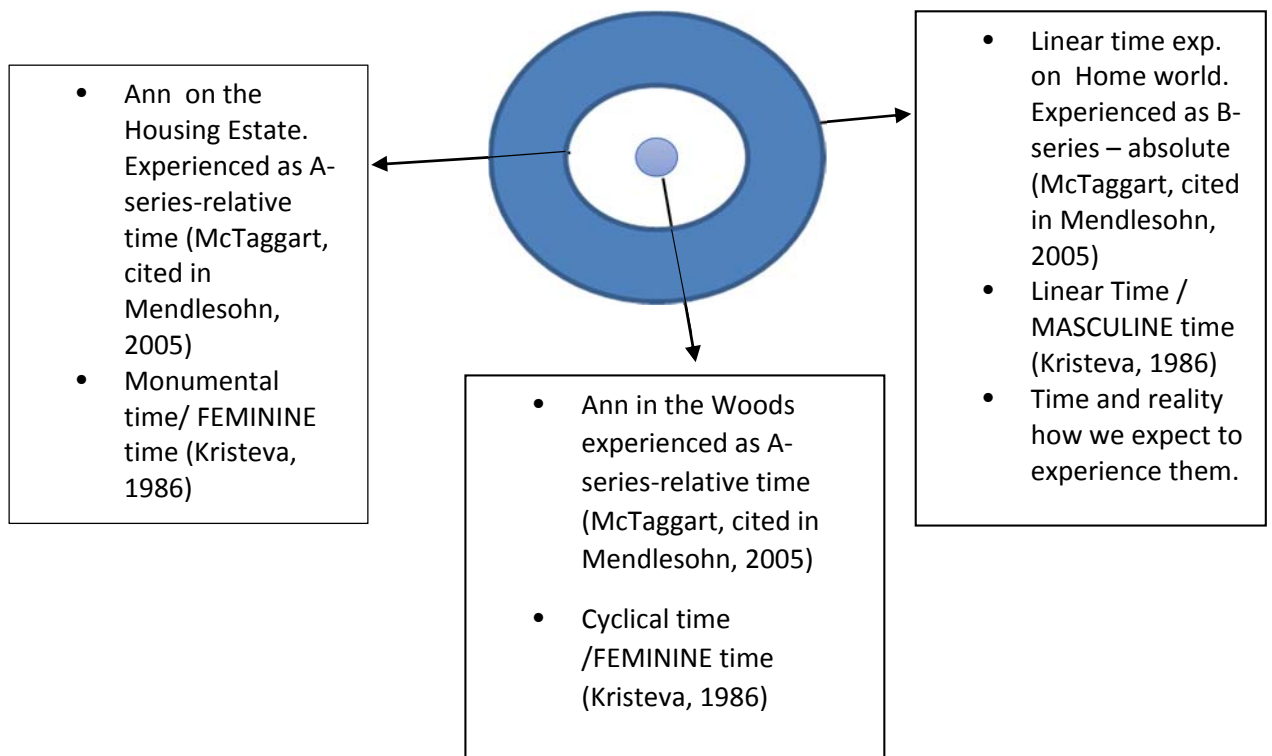


Ann in the wood. A-series-relative

Linear time exp. on the home world.
B-series-absolute time.

Ann in the housing estate. B-series-absolute.

H. Model of A-series-relative and B-series-absolute time. In conjunction with the Kristevan model of masculine and feminine time.



I. The characters in *Hexwood*. Detailing the characters and the alternative names by which they are identified throughout the narrative.

Mordion Agenos – Reigners’ Servant – Slave – 1st Reigner
Ann – Vierran – Girl Child – 2nd Reigner
Hume – Kmortellian Pender – Merlin – Prisoner – 3rd Reigner
Sir Artegal – Arthur Pendragon – The King – 4th Reigner
Martin Stavely – Fitela Wolfson (Dragon slayer in *Beowulf*) – the boy – 5th Reigner
Yam or Yamaha – the Bannus
Dragon – Orm Pender- Reigner 1
King Ambitas - Reigner 2
Morgan Le Trey – Reigner 3
Sir Fors – Reigner 4
Sir Harrisoun – Harry (or Harrison) Scudmore- switches on the Bannus
Lady Sylvia – Siri

J. *Merlin*: The heroes. Sir Leon, Sir Gawain, Sir Lancelot, King Arthur, Sir Elyan and Sir Percival.

Available at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/1V1KpJj4K94SgFPfVmNnpCm/heroes>



K. *Merlin*: The Villains. Nimueh, Lady Catrina, Morgause and Morgana.

Available at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4wDIVWpmRwz0YxhTCdZNcQW/villains>



L. Morgana on her way to the druids. The depiction is strikingly similar to the fairy tale 'Little Red Riding Hood'

Images from screen capture.



M. The changing faces of Morgana La Fey.

Images available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00mjlxv>



Series one

Series two

Series three

Series four

N. The stand-off between Morgana and Arthur. (4:13)

Image from screen capture.



O. Gwen during her time with Helios. (4:11)

Image from screen capture.



P. Guinevere as Arthur's death is announced.

Leon: 'The King is dead. Long live the Queen'. *Merlin* (5:13).

Image from screen capture.



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